

Ed Romaine

TITLE: Chair of the Supply Chain Execution Systems & Technologies Group for the Material Handling Industry of America; chief marketing officer for Sapient Automation

WEBSITE: www.mhia.org/industrygroups/scestg; www.getsapient.com

EXPERIENCE: 30 years working with materials handling and logistics companies, primarily in marketing

DUTIES: Build awareness through education of the software and control systems that drive warehouse and supply chain processes

Modern: You have been around the industry for a long time. When it comes to supply chain execution software, what are the most important changes you've observed?

Romaine: You have to start off with the ability to communicate across systems and not just control islands of automation. When I started working in the industry, we had data systems and equipment control systems.

Today, we are developing a seamless flow of information and data that starts in the warehouse and flows to transportation, manufacturing, customer service, and accounting and finance. Today's systems are much easier to use, and we're now moving from software behind the firewall to the cloud. Those are major changes.

Modern: You just mentioned the ability to connect software systems to create seamless processes across the supply chain. How far along are we in that kind of connectivity?

Romaine: That depends on your terms of measurement. If you look at where we were 30 years ago, it's night and day. But, there is



still a long way to go. The limiting factor has been the capabilities of hardware systems. That's where a lot of research and development has been, especially on the software side of automated systems. It's truly been a building block process. The second limiting factor has been delivering value. Linking a warehouse management system (WMS) and a warehouse control system clearly delivers value. We have talked about linking WMS and transportation management systems (TMS) for years, but for a long time, gas was cheap and there wasn't any urgency. With gas pushing \$4 a gallon, TMS has huge opportunities to deliver value and you have companies looking to link

systems with the TMS. Needs drive innovation.

Modern: At MHIA, you represent software providers and equipment manufacturers. How important is software to the equipment side of the materials handling business?

Romaine: It's essential. When you're talking about very sophisticated systems, the software allows users to get what they really need out of the system. In recent years, the industry has focused on adding software to hardware to create a solution that delivers an ROI. That is especially important now that companies are looking to automation to replace labor. Again, software is delivering the ROI. □