

# B2B business trends 2026: how AI, data, and trust will shape the next growth era

Why 2026 is a tipping point for businesses to transform operations, relationships, and go-to-market strategies for the AI-driven economy.



# The future in motion: harnessing 2026 trends for competitive edge

## Methodology

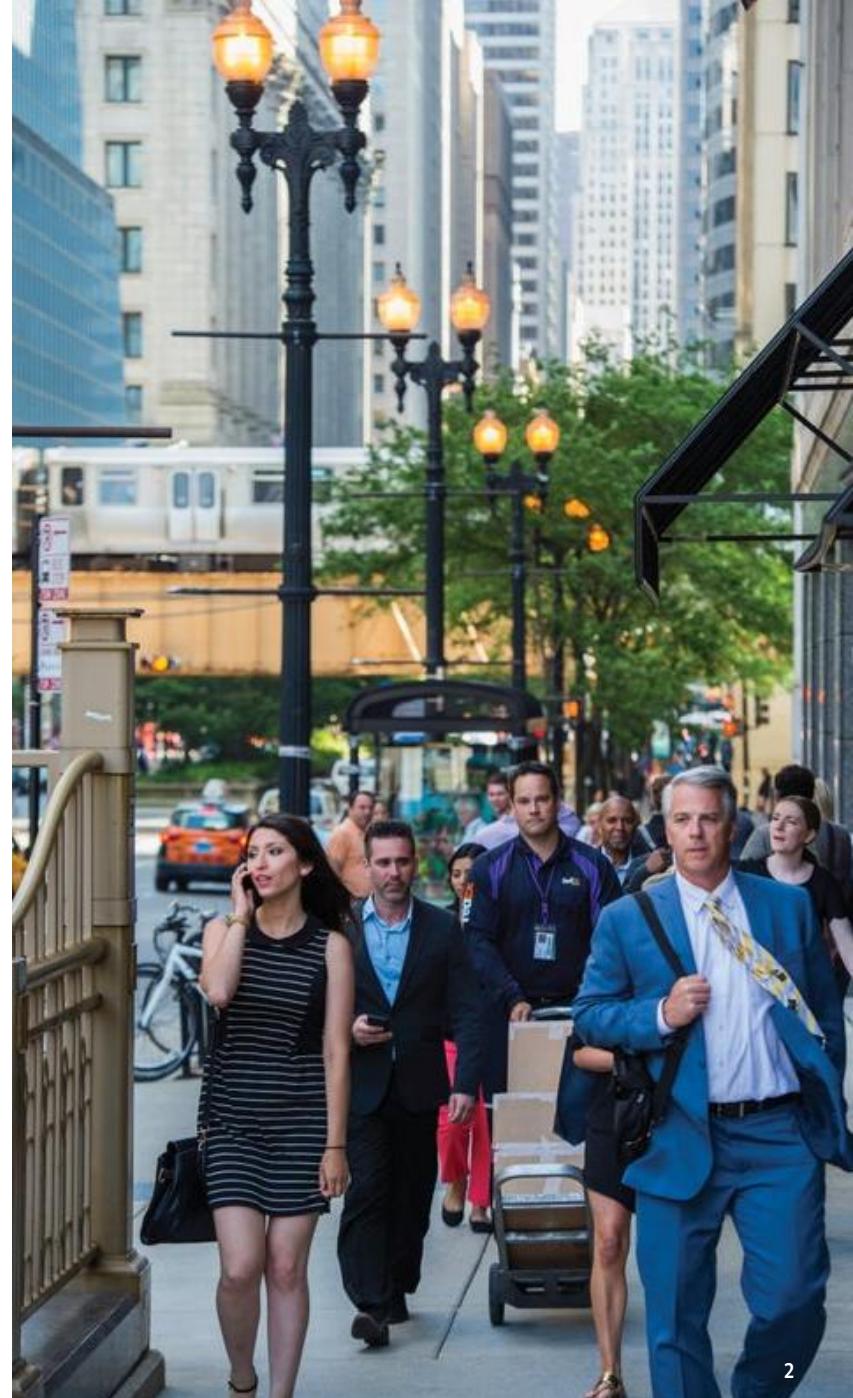
To deliver a comprehensive thought leadership report on the dynamic future of the business landscape, FedEx worked with C Space to analyze industry data as well as communities of consumers, small, and medium-sized businesses to get their perspectives.

Sources and references are diligently footnoted to provide transparency and credibility to the insights presented.

Our methodology ensures a rich and nuanced exploration of the 2025 business landscape, to highlight the key takeaways and trends to consider going into 2026.

**This report provides thoughtful and actionable takeaways throughout, empowering readers to leverage these insights and grow your business.**

For more information about how FedEx can support your business throughout the year, [\*\*visit our Small Business Resources Center.\*\*](#)



# The four pillars smart businesses must prioritize for 2026

*Click on a topic below to jump to the insights!*

1

## **Resilient supply chains:**

Intelligent ecosystems using automation, AI, and digital platforms will boost efficiency, cut costs, improve decision-making, and enhance customer retention through timely delivery and market adaptability.

2

## **B2B e-commerce expectations:**

Enhanced competitiveness by adopting digital self-service portals and AI-driven personalization will help to meet consumer-like demands for speed, personalization, and transparency in business transactions.

3

## **AI democratization:**

Accessible AI tools are becoming a standard part of business operations, enabling companies of all sizes to automate tasks, gain real-time insights, and improve decision-making without deep technical expertise.

4

## **Data and automation:**

Big Data and AI will transform decision-making and efficiency through advanced analytics, automating tasks, optimizing logistics with API solutions, and enhancing customer experiences with predictive insights.

# Supply chain management is evolving into an intelligent, self-optimizing ecosystem

Automation, AI, and digital platforms are merging to enhance supply chain resilience, adaptability, and responsiveness, transforming how goods move, and decisions are made.

## Automation and AI accelerate responsiveness:

AI and automation enable self-adjusting supply networks that optimize labor and speed delivery.

**80%**

of logistics firms report positive ROI from warehouse automation<sup>2</sup>.

**57%**

of supply-chain leaders\* use AI to predict demand, prevent disruptions, and improve accuracy<sup>1</sup>.

\*Supply chain leaders are defined as respondents with strategic and operational responsibility in supply chain, manufacturing, or operations roles.

## Digital platforms build real-time visibility:

IoT-enabled sensors and Digital-twin simulations\*\* enable proactive risk management, inventory rebalancing, and real-time shipment rerouting.



of companies in 2025 report **improved end-to-end supply-chain visibility** through digital tools, with **71% achieving cost reductions**<sup>1</sup>.



IoT-enabled sensors detect 60%+ of potential disruptions earlier<sup>2</sup>.



Digital-twin simulations\*\* deliver up to 10% efficiency gains and 30% cost savings<sup>3</sup>.

\*\*Digital representations of physical products and processes

## What does this mean for your business?

Leading companies will transform supply chains by integrating AI and automation, setting new standards for efficiency and labor use.

Forward-thinking businesses will use AI in supply management to automate tasks and gain predictive insights, enhancing demand forecasting and disruption prevention.

Organizations that adopt digital platforms for supply chain visibility will achieve significant efficiency and cost savings, aligning innovations with business goals to maximize ROI.

# Multi-sourcing, near-shoring, and AI routing are embraced for stability

The rise of flexible supplier networks, and shared logistics partnerships signals a new era of agile, data-driven supply chains designed to anticipate disruption rather than react to it.

**87%**

business leaders cite **geopolitical risk** as a growing concern<sup>1</sup>

**74%**

faced **supply-chain disruptions** in the past two years<sup>2</sup>

**63%**

Saw **negative impacts** from supply chain disruptions<sup>2</sup>

**58%**

have **diversified suppliers** to offset tariffs and disruptions<sup>1</sup>

## Collaboration and flexible supplier networks as emerging growth drivers:

Firms are shifting from linear to segmented networks, combining **offshore, nearshore, friendshore, and onshore** sourcing<sup>2 3</sup>.

Companies are partnering across **suppliers, customers, and competitors** to build agile and sustainable supply chains<sup>4</sup>.



**Amazon and FedEx relationship:** Expands Amazon's residential delivery for large items, enhancing efficiency and flexibility<sup>5</sup>.

## What does this mean for your business?

Companies that embrace adaptable supplier networks can better handle geopolitical changes and seize new market opportunities.

Innovative partnerships for shared logistics will be vital, cutting costs, speeding up deliveries, and improving service to strengthen market presence.

Strategic collaborations that provide value-added services like tiered savings and cash-flow support are key to attracting and retaining customers, ensuring sustainable growth.

# Businesses are adopting new tools, partnerships, and strategies to manage challenges and uncertainty

Tariffs and geopolitical tensions are pushing businesses to adapt through new sourcing strategies and regionalized logistics models.

## Where to source?:

Many business are shifting sourcing from China to Southeast Asia, Mexico, or local suppliers<sup>1</sup>, or are using warehousing, flexible capacity, and scenario planning to manage shocks<sup>2,3</sup>.

## Building tariff proof pricing:

As of June 2025, over 50% of small and medium businesses plan to implement **dynamic pricing**<sup>4</sup>.

*\*Dynamic pricing* refers to adjusting shipping rates in real time based on demand, capacity, and cost fluctuations

## Business planning checklist:

- ✓ Diversify suppliers
- ✓ Use digital customs tools
- ✓ Partner with logistics providers for compliance
- ✓ Prepare dynamic pricing models

## What does this mean for your business?

Leading companies will diversify supplier networks and regionalize supply chains, especially in Mexico and Southeast Asia, to mitigate risks and boost efficiency by reducing shipping distances.

Industry leaders will integrate scenario planning and agile contracting into their operations to quickly adapt to changes in tariffs or geopolitics, using dynamic pricing to optimize logistics costs.

Forward-thinking organizations will partner closely with logistics providers for expertise in customs and trade compliance, using tools like FedEx Global Trade Manager and Import Tool to streamline operations and stay competitive.

# Buyers are adopting consumer-like expectations for speed and visibility

As B2B buyers adopt consumer-like expectations — speed, autonomy, personalization, and digital clarity — companies must deliver experiences that are as frictionless and intelligent as retail e-commerce, or risk losing relevance.

**85%**

Of B2B buyers faced online-ordering frustrations<sup>2</sup>

**75%**

Would switch suppliers for a better experience<sup>2</sup>

## Key pain points for B2B Buyers<sup>3</sup>:

 Poor visibility on stock

 Delivery timelines

 Pricing



*Between September and November 2025, small and medium businesses report an increase in the importance of fast delivery for their B2B customers, as peak season approaches.<sup>1</sup>*

## Consumer habits have shaped B2B expectations, with digital self-service and personalization at the forefront.

### Self-service experiences

61% of B2B buyers prefer rep-free, digital self-service options<sup>4</sup>

B2B buyers expect **seamless, mobile first and self-service experiences**, shaped by their own consumer habits<sup>5</sup>

### Personalization expectations

66% of B2B buyers expect B2C-level personalization<sup>6</sup>

87% will pay more for personalization, and 39% are frustrated by its absence<sup>7</sup>

## What does this mean for your business?

B2B customer engagement will transform with mobile-first portals integrating product info, order processing, and account management, boosting satisfaction and streamlining sales.

New B2B transparency standards will include real-time delivery tracking and stock updates, mirroring B2C expectations.

AI and data analytics will become essential for delivering personalized buying experiences to meet sophisticated client demands.

Customer support evolves with advanced chatbots and AI solutions offering instant responses and resolutions, enhancing loyalty and reducing friction.

# Personalization is the new loyalty program

Personalized delivery experience now directly shapes brand perception, with customers rewarding brands that give them control over their experience.

**80%**

Of consumers are more likely to purchase from brands offering personalized experiences<sup>1</sup>

**70%**

Expect personalization as a standard service<sup>1</sup>

**81%**

abandoned carts when preferred delivery options were unavailable<sup>2</sup>

**42%**

Feel frustrated when content is not relevant to them<sup>1</sup>

## Expected delivery personalization options by customers:

 Real-time tracking<sup>3</sup>

 Delivery location flexibility (e.g., private lockers, alternate pickup points<sup>4</sup>)

 Narrow delivery windows of 2 hours or less<sup>4</sup>

 Ability to schedule deliveries<sup>4</sup>

## How your business can leverage AI to enhance personalization:

### Use AI to send proactive order updates.



81% of consumers expect proactive updates on delays or changes<sup>3</sup>

### Personalize customer communications.



86% of small businesses using AI report that the tech has significantly improved customer communications<sup>5</sup>

## What does this mean for your business?

The customer experience will be revolutionized by implementing cutting-edge real-time tracking and predictive notifications, ensuring that customers are always informed about their order's status and subsequent steps.

Strategic investment in AI and digital transformation will redefine personalized delivery experiences, driving unprecedented performance gains, revenue growth, and operational efficiency through tailored interactions and customizable shipping solutions.

# AI is reshaping how businesses operate across key functions

In 2026, AI adoption will shift from optional to essential for small and medium business survival.



## Marketing

- 54% of small businesses say AI improves marketing<sup>1</sup>.
- Canva and generative tools let non-designers create brand-ready visuals easily<sup>2</sup>.
- Cloud-based AI delivers data insights, boosting efficiency and smarter marketing decisions<sup>3</sup>.



## Customer support & sales

- Generative chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT) manage FAQs, orders, and assist agents with replies and summaries<sup>4</sup>.
- 80% of small and medium businesses worldwide plan to adopt AI chatbots by 2026, showing strong conversational AI growth<sup>5</sup>.



## Search

- Generative AI tools (like ChatGPT) are changing how customers find information, many skip websites entirely.
- Traditional SEO is no longer enough; businesses need Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) to stay visible.
- GEO focuses on clear, question-driven content that AI can easily summarize and recommend.

## What does this mean for your business?

AI is reshaping marketing by enabling faster campaign creation and real-time insights for smarter decision-making.

Conversational AI adoption is accelerating, with chatbots managing routine inquiries and providing 24/7 support while reducing operational strain.

AI-powered search means customers may never visit your site, optimize content for AI by using simple language, answering common questions, and keeping responses concise and accurate.

# Leveraging AI for small and medium businesses

Harness the power of AI to drive growth, improve efficiency, and stay competitive in an increasingly digital marketplace.

## AI opportunities

- Adopt scalable AI tools that can grow with your business, like no-code platforms, cloud APIs, and software with built-in AI features. These tools boost productivity and efficiency without needing deep technical knowledge.
- Implement AI-driven customer service tools, such as chatbots and AI assistants. They improve response quality, speed up response times, and handle routine questions, leading to happier customers and lower costs.
- Address AI-related data privacy and security challenges. Ensure human oversight and carefully choose AI tools to reduce risks while maintaining quality and accountability.
- AI is transforming search, with 25% of global queries expected to be AI-driven by 2026. Businesses must shift from traditional SEO to Generative Engine Optimization (GEO), focusing on conversational prompts, trust, and visibility in AI-generated answers.

## The impact is significant:

### Reported benefits

+30% productivity, +23% quality, -8% costs, and 4–8% revenue growth on average; 31% cite further positive impacts<sup>1</sup>.

8 in 10 small business owners credit AI and tech with helping navigate inflation, supply chain issues, and capital access<sup>2</sup>.

## What does this mean for your business?

AI tools can adapt as your business grows, allowing you to scale operations without adding complexity.

By automating routine interactions and speeding up response times, AI helps you deliver faster, more personalized service.

AI can help you monitor data security and compliance more effectively, reducing risks while maintaining trust. This ensures your business stays resilient and accountable.

By structuring content for AI, your business can become a trusted source in AI answers, driving visibility, credibility, and even enabling AI-powered transactions.

# Getting started with AI

Four focus areas for getting the most out of AI implementation

## Customer support automation

Use AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants to handle routine inquiries, provide instant responses, and route complex issues to the right team members. This **reduces wait times and improves customer satisfaction** without increasing headcount.

## Marketing & financial insights

Leverage AI to analyze customer behavior, campaign performance, and financial trends in real time. These insights help you **optimize marketing spend, forecast revenue, and make smarter investment decisions**.

## Predictive analytics for demand or pricing

AI can forecast demand patterns and suggest optimal pricing strategies based on market conditions and historical data. This helps you **stay competitive, reduce waste, and maximize profitability**.

## Search optimization

AI-driven search is replacing traditional SEO, with generative engines prioritizing trusted, structured content over keyword rankings. To stay visible, businesses should adopt Generative Engine Optimization (GEO) by focusing on conversational queries, building citation authority, and structuring content for AI summaries.

## What does this mean for your business?

Automating support means your customers get quick answers and consistent experiences, even during peak times.

AI-driven insights give you a clear picture of what's working and what's not, whether in marketing or financial planning. This reduces guesswork and helps you allocate resources more effectively.

Predictive analytics allow you to anticipate demand and adjust pricing before market shifts happen.

AI search opens the door to new visibility opportunities beyond traditional search engines. Businesses can influence decisions earlier in the buying journey, gain share of voice in emerging platforms, and position itself for future AI-driven commerce.

# Big Data will fuel smarter choices, faster execution, and predictable outcomes

## What is Big Data?

*Big Data refers to the massive volume of structured (spreadsheets, order logs, etc.) and unstructured (emails, reviews, etc.) data generated through everyday business activities.*

## Why is it important?

*Big Data involves analyzing vast datasets to uncover patterns and insights that traditional methods might miss. It is crucial for AI tools, as large datasets provide the necessary information to train models for accurate forecasting, personalized customer experiences, and automation.*

*By leveraging Big Data, you can enhance decision-making and improve operational efficiencies through AI-driven solutions.*

## How is it being used?

*In 2026, FedEx will use big data via a new suite of digital tools offerings designed to help customers make the most out of their existing data. This data-driven model seeks to improve overall visibility and customer satisfaction scores for those working with FedEx.*

Over 90% of organizations are already using Big Data to drive business decisions<sup>1</sup>.

**89%**

With mature Big Data strategies report better decision-making<sup>1</sup>

**87%**

With mature Big Data strategies see improved customer satisfaction<sup>1</sup>

## Real-time workflows bring several key benefits:

- **Immediate insights** – identifying anomalies or risks as they occur
- **Live data** – powering business intelligence tools with fresh data
- **Auto reactions** – trigger workflows, alerts, or downstream logic<sup>2</sup>
- **Competitive foresight** – use analytics to anticipate shifts and stay ahead of changing needs
- **Market responsiveness** – spot trends early to identify new product and innovation opportunities
- **Agility and speed** – proactive innovation approach that shortens time-to-market and improved success rates<sup>3</sup>

## What does this mean for your business?

Businesses can transform customer service and inventory management by analyzing existing structured and unstructured data to uncover hidden patterns, setting new operational standards.

Adopt real-time analytics platforms like Power BI and Zoho Analytics for instant insights, reshaping risk and opportunity management on the spot.

Predictive tools like QuickBooks Advanced Reporting are crucial for proactively managing supply chains, preventing stockouts, over-ordering, and delays.

# Big Data transforms customer experience through hyper-relevant, timely offers

By enabling highly personalized customer experiences across industries and allowing tailored offers, **Big Data will help businesses improve engagement and strengthen customer loyalty** through deeper insights into behavior, preferences, and real-time needs.

## Predictive insights:

Big data and predictive analytics greatly improve customer experience:

**80%**

Of customers feel stronger brand affinity when there is personalization involved<sup>1</sup>

**76%**

Of customers are more likely to purchase from a brand that offers personalized experiences<sup>2</sup>



Netflix uses **viewing data, search history, and ratings** to **personalize content** across 76,897 alt genres. As a result, Netflix engagement is up 25%<sup>3,4</sup>

## Nike

Uses **member app data** (workouts, purchases, browsing) to **tailor product drops, sizing suggestions, and rewards**. Members receive exclusive offers based on interests and activity levels<sup>5</sup>.

## John Deere

Leverages machine and field data to **serve tailored maintenance insights and crop recommendations** to farmers<sup>6</sup>.

## What does this mean for your business?

Harness the power of advanced analytics to unearth deep customer insights, enabling the creation of hyper-personalized marketing strategies and innovative product offerings that redefine customer engagement.

Utilize cutting-edge predictive analytics to foresee customer needs and behaviors, empowering your business to revolutionize the customer journey and cultivate an unparalleled level of brand loyalty.

# Building a connected digital backbone

Digital platforms and automation are turning logistics and back-office workflows into faster, more accurate, always-on systems that help even small businesses operate like large, tech-enabled players.



**97%**

of organizations now use at least one automation technology globally<sup>1</sup>

**85%**

of logistics firms saw measurable value from digital initiatives, with double-digit gains in productivity, efficiency, and visibility<sup>2</sup>

**66%**

of small and medium businesses mention integrated technology, systems, or software as critical to running their business<sup>3</sup>

API-enabled logistics for routing, forecasting, and carrier management delivers 15–30% better asset use, 90% faster order processing, and ~90% fewer errors<sup>4</sup>.

## How businesses are currently implementing API-enabled logistics:

### Shopify merchants using ShipBob

Shopify merchants connect their stores to ShipBob (a third-party logistics provider) through APIs so that new orders, inventory levels, and tracking numbers sync automatically between Shopify and ShipBob's fulfillment centers.<sup>5</sup>

### FedEx Advanced Integrated Visibility

Retailers using the FedEx Advanced Visibility webhook\* receive near real-time in-transit shipment events. These proactive notifications both improve recipient confidence and helps reduce customer service calls and delivery disputes.<sup>6</sup>

*\*Similar to APIs, webhooks are utilized by the FedEx Integrator Program to send updates as a package moves through the different stages of the distribution process<sup>7</sup>.*

## What does this mean for your business?

Automate repetitive tasks like data entry and shipment tracking to improve efficiency, reduce errors, and allow business growth without needing more staff.

Implement API-enabled logistics and webhooks to automate changes to inventory level and order status, while also receiving real-time updates as products move.

Utilize the FedEx Integrator Program to seamlessly integrate your FedEx services into supply chain management products through APIs and webhooks.

# 2026 B2B action framework: what this means for you.

The businesses that will win in 2026 will be the ones that turn insight into action — using data, AI, and experience-led engagement as growth accelerators.

Customer expectations are climbing, decision cycles are compressing, and competitive differentiation is shifting from product to experience, value, and speed.

## **The signals are clear:**

- Personalization becomes a baseline expectation, not a premium feature.
- Data and AI shift decision-making from reactive to predictive.
- Trust, transparency, and experience become currency for loyalty.
- Technology maturity will separate leaders from laggards — fast.

## **Priority actions to prepare for 2026:**

- Build first-party data strategies and activate insights in real time.
- Invest in AI-driven personalization to create more relevant offers and journeys.
- Strengthen trust with transparent communications, reliability, and performance.
- Re-architect customer experiences around behaviors, not assumptions.
- Measure outcomes through LTV, conversion lift, and engagement depth.

## **The bottom line**

Data, AI, and experience innovation are reshaping how businesses compete. Those who adapt now will unlock faster growth, higher retention, and a more resilient customer base. The shift is already in motion — 2026 belongs to the proactive.



# Industry spotlights: how trends play out in key sectors

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# 2026 outlook: the ‘intelligent, regional, and green’ auto system

Approaching 2026, **localized, tech-enabled ecosystems** are becoming the new norm, marked by agility, sustainability, and autonomy; logistics partners are pivotal in this transition, tasked with delivering **end-to-end digital visibility, predictive routing, and sustainability linked logistics models**.

**Predictive analytics** are being used for inventory accuracy, lead-time reduction, and real-time risk detection, ensuring smooth component delivery to assembly plants.<sup>1</sup>

**Automation** in warehousing and routing is enabling faster replenishment and lower human-error risk, vital for maintaining continuity in high-volume auto parts logistics.<sup>2</sup>

**Geopolitical tensions and tariffs** are prompting OEMs to reconfigure supply chains – Nearshoring to Mexico and regional hubs is gaining traction, slashing transport costs by 20-30% and enhancing agility.<sup>3</sup>

Automotive logistics now **depend on IoT sensors and telematics** for temperature, location, and condition tracking, ensuring quality for precision components and batteries.<sup>4,5</sup>

Automotive firms are using data-driven decisions in production, maintenance, and delivery, with benchmarks showing predictive maintenance cuts breakdowns by 75% and offers a 10x ROI.<sup>6</sup>



**Sustainable supply-chain reporting** is becoming more common, prompting companies to invest in:



EV-based delivery fleets



Low-emission transport



Recyclable packaging

# 2026 outlook: smart, sustainable, compliant healthcare supply chains

Healthcare logistics are shifting to smart, sustainable, and compliance-focused systems, using predictive analytics, AI-assisted fulfillment, and low-emission transport as standard practices; logistics partners must enable AI-driven visibility, cold-chain automation, and ESH-compliant delivery models.

AI, IoT sensors, and digital twins enhance real-time visibility and predictive intelligence in healthcare supply chains by monitoring temperature, humidity, and shipment conditions for vaccines, biologics, and medical devices.<sup>1</sup>

Predictive analytics and automation improve delivery accuracy, enable proactive rerouting, ensure compliance, and minimize errors for timely delivery of critical medical supplies.<sup>2</sup>

Healthcare firms are nearshoring manufacturing and logistics due to global tariffs and geopolitical tensions, increasing costs and complexity but investing in digital tools for supply continuity.<sup>3</sup>

IoT tracking, telematics, self-service portals, and API integrations improve visibility, management, and accuracy in temperature-controlled logistics, reducing errors and enhancing transparency.<sup>4</sup>

Big data analytics boost healthcare logistics by halving equipment downtime, cutting fuel costs by 30%, and optimizing stock to reduce shortages and waste, while enhancing safety, traceability, and efficiency.<sup>5</sup>



Home wellness is booming due to:

- Aging demographics
- Increased demand for GLP-1 products and wearables
- Normalization of telehealth

Direct-to-consumer fulfillment, enhanced reliability, overnight performance, and delivery control/visibility will be crucial.

# Thank You

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