

Q&A with
Brent Yeagy
Wabash President and CEO



Transportation, logistics and distribution is a dynamic and complex industry. At the start of a new year and in the run-up to Ignite — Wabash’s thought leadership ecosystem event — Wabash CEO Brent Yeagy shared what’s on his mind as a manufacturer and distributor in today’s marketplace.

Q: What high-level themes do you think will drive conversations among participants at Ignite 2024?

A: When you think about what’s happening in our business – and what’s happening in our customers’ world – there are certainly a number of prevailing themes in the economy of “making” and “moving” things. First, and it may be obvious, everyone is looking at leveraging and integrating technology across their business; be it digital, AI, cloud data, or automation.

Or, working to capture, codify and incorporate critical learnings from the massive amounts of change the world has experienced these past five years in an effort to improve the resilience of their businesses. I think we have an incredible opportunity to learn from the supply chain disruptions and COVID-19 to really examine what worked and what didn’t and where we were exposed, then adjust our systems and processes to fill those gaps and be more adaptive and agile.

These are a few of the things I believe are on the minds of most leaders today.



Q: At a more micro-level, what are some of the most pressing issues you are seeing? What's keeping you up at night?

A: Alphabetically or...? Seriously, and among many, I think everyone in the logistics business is figuring out how issues like warehouse inventories and shipping increasing capacities are, on one hand, limiting, or at least challenging, our industry today and, on the other hand, offering those that are paying attention intriguing and exciting opportunities to optimize them. I predict we will see partnerships between shippers – 3PLs and 4PLs – and manufacturers to not only chip away at the urgent need – but to also get a piece of what is projected to be \$20 billion spent on this building boom by 2027.

There's also a labor shortage, especially among drivers and warehouse employees. We have to consider how this factors into or affects our products and services. At the same time, we're having to consider how to address current needs while building a stronger people pipeline for the future. And, what role does technology and automation play as a possible answer?

In our business strategies, we are contending with truly complex and nuanced issues like geopolitical impacts; efforts to right-size 30-years' worth of globalization to include more near-shoring and local manufacturing; and figuring out how to meet the ever-growing, final mile demands of e-commerce. The list goes on.

The point is – issues that affect all of us can – and should be – addressed by all of us together, so we don't spend time and resources developing hundreds of one-off solutions. Meetings like Ignite bring together "makers" and "movers" and create environments for working together to bring solutions, at scale, to solve some of the industry's toughest problems.

Q: You mentioned automation in relation to warehousing labor solutions – what other technology is becoming more valuable and important to the business today?

A: There is no part of our logistics world that isn't touched by technology. Manufacturers and shippers are looking at all points of the lifecycle for their products and services for how technology can be scaled to make the process more efficient – and more valuable.

Tech stacks, common controllers, and connected solutions are technologies that are quickly becoming standard and, increasingly, at the core of all processes and are being optimized for manufacturing and distribution.

But, here's where I have a watch-out: I believe the success or failure of technology lies not in its development, rather in its application. Specifically, in its adoption. As any leader who's been through a technology transformation or rollout in their company knows, getting people to pick up the new tool, and use it, is the real challenge. I'm expecting we will see increased emphasis, first, on



whether or not the solution is not only technologically feasible, but also if it addresses and works within the realities of the business – whether it’s “business feasible.” For that, you need to spend as much R&D on adoption methods, on training and on change management to successfully move people through the adoption curve.

Q: In light of all you have shared, what do you think is required of leaders today to deliver these commitments?

A: It’s interesting to me, given all the change we’ve just touched on, that good leadership – good stewardship – of companies remains much the same. Leadership requires vision, having reliable market data and understanding the insights and the story they tell. Then, it takes being bold to move on it and disciplined and confident enough in your actions that they are seen all the way through to the desired end – even if that end is a fail. Not all technologies will work, but you have to have the courage to try new things and have the wherewithal to “fail fast” – know when to pivot and gear-up for trying the next idea.

This, to me, is what resilience is.

Creating and maintaining a scalable, sustainable, resilient infrastructure for your business is what leaders should be focused on today. It doesn’t matter how sound the strategy is or how great the company’s culture is, if the structure is wrong or if the processes are outdated it’s not going to work, and its value never fully created or harvested. The design and engineering of infrastructure with an eye to resilience is the future.

As we approach the mid-2020s, leadership of our respective companies and our industry requires us to anticipate change, embrace it when it shows up at our front doors, and navigate it with resiliency. We must build cultures around resiliency.

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Watch for more conversations with industry thought leaders as we approach Ignite 2024, September 30 through October 2 in Louisville, KY.