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IT Thought Leaders

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Q: Are companies missing a great opportunity by not using Foreign Trade Zones (FTZs), given the market advantage they can provide?

Slossberg: The simple answer is 'maybe.' The best way to identify whether the ROI justifies the investment is to engage an FTZ consultant. This professional can walk you through the process and make a sound recommendation.

Should the analysis yield an affirmative, then choose technology to support the envisioned FTZ operations, whether distributing from or manufacturing within the zone. When evaluating solutions, consider:

- Is the system Web-based? Can it be hosted or owned?
- Does it possess a centralized compliance database?
- Is it configurable out of the box?
- Will integration to existing ERP or warehouse management systems be difficult?
- Does it possess complete functionality (compliance, inventory management, distribution, and manufacturing)?
- Does the system have export and import options and self-entry capability?
- Does the user interface allow both automated and manual input?

The fit of the right technology to current and envisioned FTZ processes maximizes market advantage and payback on investment.

Q: Can small and medium enterprises (SMEs) attain world-class global sourcing control and visibility, given the high cost of global trade management (GTM) solutions?

Slossberg: SMEs cannot afford to trade worldwide without GTM technology; luckily, GTM software is more reasonably priced than ever

before. SMEs can maximize affordability by working with a provider that offers modules or a phased implementation, thereby satisfying immediate technology needs now, and deferring future requirements without fear of obsolescence.

With cost no longer the obstacle, the ability to obtain executive buy-in still prevents many SMEs from leveraging the savings and productivity GTM delivers. Project managers need to 'push the right button' and identify the element -- tax savings, faster product turn rates, leaner inventories, lower overhead -- that resonates with their C-level executive. ROI is easily demonstrated, and vendors possess tools to calculate business-specific savings that will convert even the diehard C-level executive to a GTM champion.

Q: Is it better to rely on a global 3PL, forwarder, or customs broker, or go it on your own when facing global sourcing challenges?

Slossberg: The importer/exporter holds responsibility when things go wrong, not 3PLs, forwarders, or customs brokers. Most often, misinformation between parties precipitates the fines, product loss, storage fees, and audits that make some believe 'going it alone' may not be the best solution. The right GTM technology, however, gives importers/exporters confidence to perform these functions in-house and the ability to transmit precise information to U.S. Customs and their intermediaries.

GTM provides the flexibility to trade compliantly in the manner that best accommodates your business model. And, GTM has never been more affordable, easier to integrate, or simpler to use.

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