
Career Shot: Supply Chain Management

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Supply chain management is all about getting the right amount of the right "stuff" (whatever that might be) to the right place at the right time. If you're talking about a manufacturing company, the supply chain starts with getting the raw materials needed for making your product and includes manufacture, delivery, and returns. When you consider that holding inventories can cost a company between 20% and 40% of their value, it's easy to see why supply chain management is so important. Holding down inventory (while still allowing for the thinnest possible "buffer" between immediate need and immediate supply) was, until the advent of the Internet, an inexact science, to say the least.

The coming of the Internet and sophisticated supply chain management software has revolutionized the field, and led to its recognition as a critical part of a company's formula for success. Supply chain management is part traditional production and operations management, and part information systems management. It is an analysis-intensive career that rewards sophisticated and creative thinking as it applies to getting -- and keeping -- that inventory time/value to a minimum.