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## **Boutique Supply Chain Consulting firm, Alpine Supply Chain Solutions is helping Companies Troubleshoot Today's Toughest Logistics Challenges**



**Michael Wohlwend**  
**Managing Principal**

**Alpine Supply Chain Solutions**

**Interview conducted by:**  
**Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor**  
**CEOCFO Magazine**

**CEOCFO: *Mr. Wohlwend, what is Alpine Supply Chain Solutions?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** Alpine Supply Chain Solutions is a boutique supply chain consulting company, focused on developing and implementing optimal solutions that drive maximum value for our customers. Our work focuses on four core areas: Warehouse Consulting, Strategic Planning, HR Solutions, Supply Chain Systems and Manufacturing.

**CEOCFO: *What do you understand, on a very basic level, about supply chain, that perhaps less knowledgeable people do not take into consideration, or do not recognize?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** It is amazing, when the supply chain works no one talks about it or gives it too much thought. But whenever there is a disruption or a shortage and people are not able to get the products and services they need, then the supply chain becomes a hot topic.

**CEOCFO: *When might an organization turn to you for help?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** We troubleshoot a lot of warehouse and distribution challenges. When you think about these areas, you have four primary assets: space, equipment, labor, and control. So, most of the time our customers come to us when they are either out of space, spending way too much on labor, unable to pick/pack/ship items efficiently, or they have a custom bespoke or legacy WMS system that needs to be replaced.

**CEOCFO: *What do you look at when you are assessing the best solution for a client? What do you take into consideration that might not usually be in the mix?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** It depends on whether we are addressing a space, equipment, labor, or control issue. For example, I have a customer with a facility that it is a location that provides a tax benefit for operating there, yet they are out of space. I would help this client determine whether they should invest in the storage and pick equipment they need to allow them to store more product in this space or whether is more cost beneficial to relocate. If I am working with a customer that is in a very tight labor market and they tell me, "Hey, I am 20 to 30 people short every shift." I would help this client evaluate automation solutions they could invest in to allow them to hit the volumes and the throughput they need today and in the next three to six years. And I would assess the ROI of that investment. This would involve a Storage Type Analysis and a goods to person evaluation.

From a systems perspective, we often see that a customer might not be using all the functionality in their current system and we investigate how they can get more from it. We might also help them understand that they have outgrown a

system and in that case, we will help them determine the requirements of a new system. We do this by looking at their unique functional requirements and evaluating vendors against them.

There is always a unique solution to each challenge whether it be a space, equipment, labor, or control issue.

**CEO CFO: *What types of companies are turning to you for services, what size, industry, or geography?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** We have really great clients. One quarter of our customers are third party logistics firms, companies that receive, store, pick, pack, and ship products for others. Another quarter of our clients are manufacturers, some are in hyper growth mode and some are Fortune 100 companies. Another quarter of customers are wholesale distributors, who receive products from several manufacturers, and ship them to an end point. Finally, the last quarter of our clients are in the retail and ecommerce space Things are nicely evenly split amongst those four types of customers, and we service three tiers, below \$500 million, between \$500 million and \$1 billion and above \$1 billion.



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**CEO CFO: *Are companies turning to you faster these days? Are they recognizing the problems sooner, or is it still behind the curve?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** For those that were ahead of the game and had been watching Amazon and understood that everybody was wanting direct-to-consumer, next day service, we were able to make leaps and bounds and ensure they were successful when Covid escalated this demand. We're seeing the direct-to-consumer pressure ease a bit now, but there are still many companies struggling to manage the demand. They either did not make the right investment to handle it pre-Covid, or they got through it, but it was painful. They had a lot of labor or quality issues or struggled with manual processes.

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**Michael Wohlwend**

Right now, we are working with three major retailers to build ecommerce specific facilities, because the order profile and the way you pick, pack and ship is completely different than when you execute retail or wholesale distribution. There is still a big demand to get direct-to-consumer processes streamlined.

**CEO CFO: *How do you help an organization embrace change?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** There are two sides to the equation. We start all projects with data. We take a customer’s “raw” data and we break it down. We look at the order profile and usually see that 80% of volume comes from 20% of a customer’s SKUs. Then we look at peak day, week, and month volumes, so we can design a solution that can meet the requirements of, not only today, but tomorrow. Once we understand the data, we apply industry best practices and can do a conceptual solution design, estimate budgets, and obtain sign off. Design is our first step.

Step two involves detailed planning and implementation. This may involve slotting items to new locations and developing a detailed move plan or working with a material handlings systems integrator to install racks, conveyors, and other equipment needed to create new efficiencies. As part of our overall change management strategy, we always develop working instructions and standard operating procedures for the new solution and perform extensive testing and user training. We make sure our solutions are running exactly like they were designed to perform before go-live so that our clients have non-event go-lives.



[Nano Diagnostics/NanoDX](#)

**CEOCFO:** *Are there newer technologies or equipment? What are you able to take advantage of today, that maybe you could not 3 years ago, 5 years ago? What has changed in the industry?*

**Mr. Wohlwend:** Two years ago, call it 2020, before the world shut down, there was probably three to five Autonomous Mobile Robot (AMR) providers, and some goods to person technology. Two years later, in 2022, there are now 20–25 AMR providers and lots of other goods to person technology. And, the applications in which they have been used and implemented have dramatically improved and increased. Just recently, we put a goods to person solution in, and we developed a proprietary replenishment process that would allow for additional throughput.

The speed at which this industry is evolving, is extremely fast. If you were to put a purchase order in right now for a goods to person technology, you probably would not see it for 10-12 months. Between now and then, many lessons will be learned and this will improve the overall value and the design of these solutions.

**CEOCFO:** *Would you tell us about Alpine Supply Chain Solutions being named a Great Supply Chain Partner by Supply Chain Brain?*

**Mr. Wohlwend:** We have been very blessed by the kind of organizations that have chosen to work with Alpine. They love the fact that we are a boutique firm and that all of our resources have over 20+ years of experience. Our approach of starting with data and leveraging our decades of experience to develop optimal solutions to maximize our customers space, equipment, labor, and control is different. We have a team of grey haired, follicly challenged, been-there-done-that/got the T-Shirt resources!

Our customers nominated us for this honor because they see the value of the solutions we have helped them design and implement. They are customers like Matt Warner, COO of MONAT Global who spoke at MODEX in March about leveraging Alpine’s team and methodology to launch a new ecommerce facility that is doing 50,000 orders a day at 42 cartons a minute. And, customers like Mark Zabloudil, COO of MJ Holding who spoke at the same event about how his company

literally eliminated the need for 40 people by leveraging technology and changing the size of their pick locations. They are now doing 2 million lines a week with an average of 4.8 cartons per order shipping to retail and are able to process 18 cartons a minute. They know that the design of their new facilities would not have been possible without the data analytics and the experience of Alpine.

As I said earlier, we have really great clients!

**CEO CFO: *Do you do much outreach? When you are at a conference, how do you stand out when there are many people there who have something they want others to use?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** Since our very beginning, we have always leveraged our knowledge to do monthly webinars. Alpine, combined with WERC (Warehouse Education Research Council), perform monthly webinars. We stay on the frontline, bringing value to the whole supply chain industry with these events.

We also have a very tenured team that has nice network. Their past clients will call us or we will reach out to them. And we also participate in key industry events with our customers as who better to tell our story than a customer? We have School Health talk about a new facility, a location addressing system within a warehouse and a move plan and Bazaar talk about reverse logistics and how important that is to returns processing. And as I mentioned early, we had 2 COOs speak at MODEX about increasing throughput at their facilities. Having our customers out there speaking and being interviewed in trade magazines is really keeping Alpine at the front of the industry.

**CEO CFO: *Would you give us your take on the current supply chain crisis? What are people missing? What do you understand? Maybe a potential way to solve it?***

**Mr. Wohlwend: Number one – diversify your suppliers. People who were only** single sourcing from China got hit hard when China shut down due to Covid. Number two – focus on getting your inventory right. Right now, I think everyone was nervous that they would not have any inventory. No one wants to lose their job because they do not have product on the shelf for back to school or the holiday season. Therefore, every single customer has taken and continues to take more than their normal allotment of international containers. We're seeing warehouses packed to the gills.

I don't think a lot of thought was given to the impact of "over getting inventory" and the cost of that, but we are starting to see the results of this. At one point an international container was about \$4,000, and we've now seen it get as high as \$40,000. That will eat into your margin! Containers have come down now, but there is still going to be a ripple effect from the high prices and it will be driving inventory holding strategies moving forward.

**CEO CFO: *Why choose Alpine Supply Chain Solutions?***

**Mr. Wohlwend:** Alpine is a boutique supply chain consulting company that leverages data and decades of experience to develop solutions that drive maximum value for our customers. We have the experience to manage almost any supply chain challenge!