

Guide

Supply Chain Engagement Guide

How to Increase Supplier Response Rates & Data Quality

Assent

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Today's Evolving Regulatory Landscape Requires Collaboration

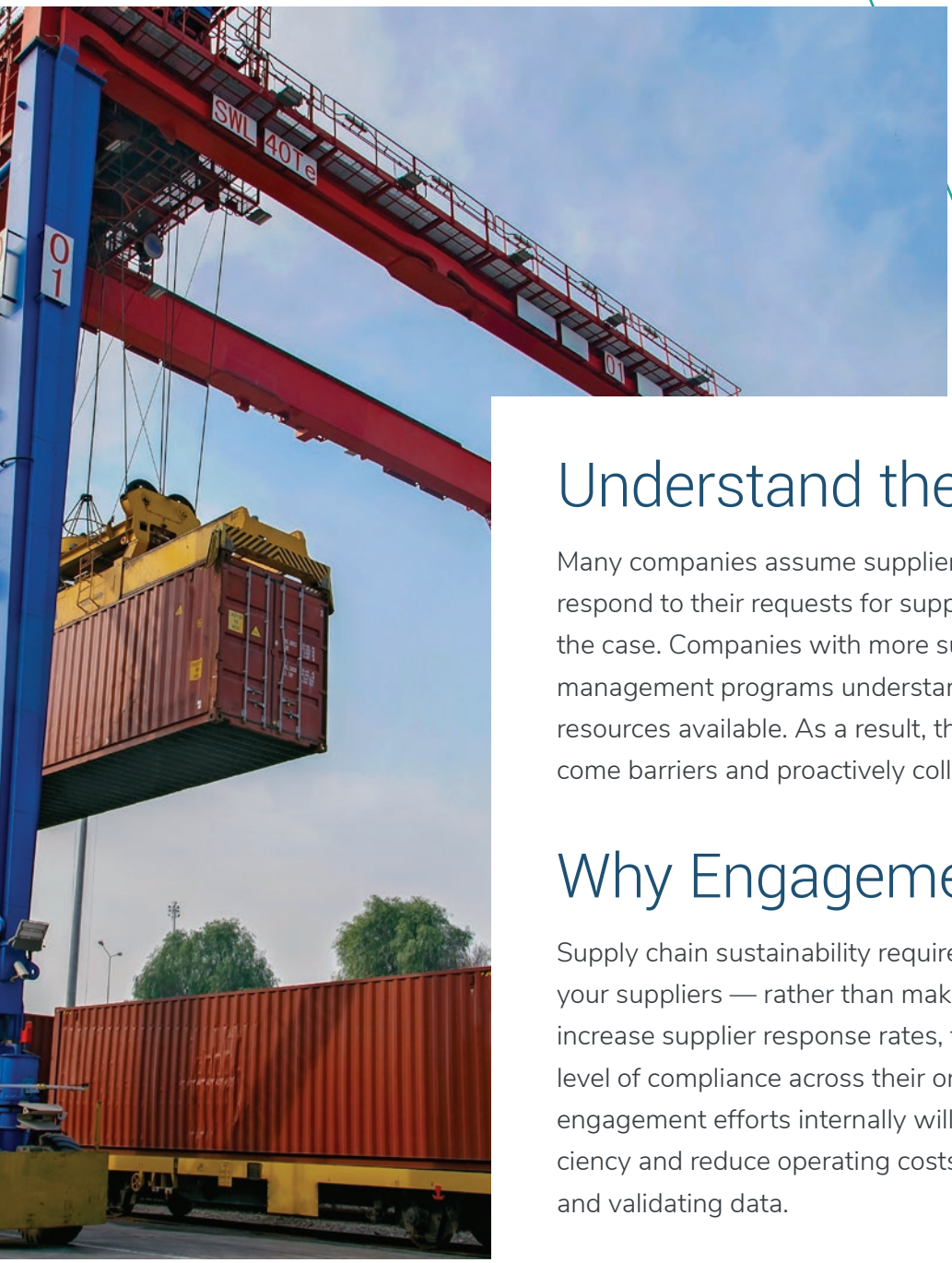


Manufacturers must make a dedicated effort to conduct due diligence across their supply chain to stay ahead of their requirements, from ensuring products comply with chemical reporting regulations to protecting the human rights of global workers. Achieving deep supply chain sustainability and a proactive compliance program requires active engagement from all parties, including your suppliers.

However, suppliers face compliance challenges of their own that can reduce their engagement with your program goals, including:

- Insufficient internal resources to match the volume of requests they receive
- Not understanding what is being asked of them and why
- A lack of support and technology

This short guide will help you improve your supplier response rates and data quality by outlining best practices for supplier engagement.



Understand the Challenges

Many companies assume suppliers will have the capacity to quickly respond to their requests for supply chain data, but that isn't often the case. Companies with more successful supply chain sustainability management programs understand that suppliers may not have similar resources available. As a result, they make accommodations to overcome barriers and proactively collect data before it is urgently needed.

Why Engagement Matters

Supply chain sustainability requires collaboration. By engaging with your suppliers — rather than making demands of them — you can increase supplier response rates, the quality of data received, and the level of compliance across their organization. Investing in supplier engagement efforts internally will improve your overall program efficiency and reduce operating costs by saving your team hours collecting and validating data.

Five Ways to Engage Your Supply Chain

1) Educate Your Suppliers

Many suppliers do not fully understand the regulations they are being asked to comply with, why certain procedures or policies are in place, or what data they should track and submit. Training and education are foundational to eliminating knowledge barriers, improving supply chain engagement, and boosting data quality. Work with a regulatory expert, either internally or from an advising partner like Assent, to develop education programs specific to your goals.

Action Items:

- Share a list of regulations and requirements your employees and suppliers need to understand
- Develop an education program and training materials, either internally or with the help of a compliance partner
- Determine and implement a training delivery mechanism, also known as a learningmanagement system (LMS). Examples include sending suppliers training videos, webinars, or written guides

2) Provide Support

As suppliers work to collate and submit requested data, they may face challenges that are new to them or confuse existing processes. This is often the result of constantly evolving regulations, and new customer demands based on environmental, social, and governance (ESG) performance. Providing a dedicated support mechanism for suppliers — someone with deep regulatory expertise that provides insights into data management — makes them feel supported in this process, reduces the risks of mistakes or violations, and demonstrates you are committed to their success.

Action Items:

- Dedicate a support person for your suppliers or outsource support to a specialist
- Educate your suppliers on how to access help
- Provide support resources suppliers can access as required

3) Implement Standards

Suppliers likely get data requests from many companies, submitted in a range of dataset configurations and formats. Standardization significantly reduces the load on suppliers, allowing them to collect for one set standard and submit to multiple customers in a standard format. Using non-standard, custom data requests for supply chain data collection introduces delays and makes it more difficult for suppliers to respond quickly.

Implementing industry standards is a mutually beneficial step manufacturers can take to reduce the burden on their suppliers while improving data quality. Using industry standard templates also makes it easier for you to demonstrate due diligence to regulators and customers since it ensures you are not missing in-demand data points.

Action Items:

- Determine what standards may apply to your business, such as IPC-1752A or IPC-1754
- Perform an impact analysis to understand how standards implementation will affect operations
- Clearly communicate and educate suppliers on these standards prior to implementation
- Start sending industry standard templates in place of custom questionnaires where possible



4) Speak Their Language

Learning to communicate with your suppliers in their language is one way to significantly increase engagement. It not only improves the clarity of communication and streamlines the data collection process, but reduces errors and non-compliance risks while demonstrating commitment to the relationship.

Action Items:

- Provide multilingual support options for global suppliers
- Ensure supporting documentation is available in your suppliers' primary languages
- Where possible, submit data requests in suppliers' primary language



5) Keep It Simple

Keeping requests simple means collecting vital information without overwhelming suppliers with additional or too-frequent requests. It reduces the burden on the supplier and allows them to focus on providing necessary information, accurately, without the distraction of fringe requests. By keeping it simple, manufacturers can improve engagement and increase the quality of data they receive.

Action Items:

- Keep instructions clear and concise when sending requests to suppliers
- Capture the most useful data possible from suppliers and give them sufficient time between requests
- Leverage standards to limit how many different types of data you are requesting from supplier



Grow Better With Assent

Assent offers supply chain sustainability solutions that optimize supplier engagement. Through our industry-leading Assent Supply Chain Sustainability Platform, we automate data management for product compliance, ESG, and trade compliance programs while engaging suppliers to collect the information our clients need.

Our industry experts provide top-level training and education through our online LMS, Assent University, while simultaneously providing 24/7, multilingual support. In addition, our platform manages a variety of data types at once, and uses relevant data across those programs, reducing the number of requests you need to submit to your suppliers.

Shaped by regulatory experts and developed in partnership with our customers and suppliers, Assent is the only solution that provides the missing foundation complex manufacturers need to make cross-enterprise and cross-supply chain collaboration possible.

Assent is the supply chain sustainability management solution dedicated to helping complex manufacturers bring responsible products to the world.

Contact Assent today at **info@assent.com** to learn more.

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