

An aerial, high-angle photograph of a massive container yard. The yard is filled with hundreds of shipping containers stacked in neat, long rows. The containers are in various colors, including red, blue, green, and white. The perspective is from a high vantage point, looking down at the yard, which is divided into lanes by white markings on the asphalt. The lighting is bright, casting long shadows across the containers. The image is partially obscured by a dark blue diagonal shape in the top left and a yellow diagonal shape in the bottom right.

VIZION

A GUIDE TO REGAINING CONTAINER VISIBILITY AND SUPPLY CHAIN CONTROL

INTRODUCTION

It has never been more challenging for shippers, beneficial cargo owners (BCOs), freight forwarders, and third-party logistics service providers (LSPs or 3PLs) to know where your ocean freight is, when it will arrive, and why it was delayed. That's because once a container leaves a port, without end-to-end visibility stakeholders are left in the dark as to the latest location and condition status. And in the dark is nowhere you want to be when customers start asking, and in some cases demanding, "Where's my stuff??!"

If you cannot see up-to-the-minute details regarding your container status, you cannot make accurate predictions. If you can't predict, you can't adapt to real-time market conditions or disruptions. And when you can't adapt fluidly, well, let's face it, you're operating from a reactive rather than a proactive position. Do that for any length of time and your supply chain will be out of control; you will be looking down the barrel of lost revenue, higher customer churn rates due to lower satisfaction, and much more.

If that's where you are now, you're no doubt feeling the pressure from all sides, management, partners, and customers alike. A lack of control probably has you feeling more than a bit anxious, trapped... perhaps even a bit helpless when it comes to making sound business decisions with confidence.

It's time to regain your edge. This guide into helping you regain container visibility and thus greater control of your supply chain will cover the following topics:

- I.** An Indisputable, Undeniable Need for Container Visibility
- II.** The Barriers to Getting Visibility
- III.** No Container Visibility = Lack of Control = Big Problems
- IV.** Regaining Control around Container Tracking
- V.** The Power of Container Tracking
- VI.** How Visibility Leads to Better Decisions
- VII.** With Visibility Solved, Teams Have More Control
- VIII.** Conclusion



THE INDISPUTABLE, UNDENIABLE NEED FOR CONTAINER VISIBILITY

Regardless of whether you're a BCO/shipper, 3PL partner, or a LogTech provider, you rely on rich, timely data to optimize operations and outcomes. The quest to find access to that data can be grueling. No doubt you're tired of having to track data manually, and frustrated when reliable data is not readily available. Here is a synopsis of why each of these stakeholders needs container visibility.

BCOS/SHIPPERS

You need to know where all your containers are at any given time. Period. You're always chasing containers, with seemingly no end in sight. If you can't get your product to market, you can't sell. Not only will that mean lost revenue, but also higher inventory carrying costs and significant damage to brand reputation.

- Optimize inventory stock levels, which will help with forecasting and product planning.
- Help control detention and demurrage costs.
- Leverage in contract negotiations with carriers.

3PLS/FREIGHT FORWARDERS

Your job is to make BCOs and other shippers happy, so they will continue to use your services. You're moving their freight, doing it on time, at a competitive rate, while minimizing costs. You also need to provide accurate ETAs and visibility through a single pane of glass at every step along the

way. That visibility is equally important to help keep you aware of potential disruptions. The ability to mitigate or even avoid disruption altogether plays a crucial role in ensuring you remain competitive.

- Predict container ETAs using real-time data.
- Facilitate actionable exception management.
- Drive efficiencies that build customer loyalty.

LOGTECH PROVIDERS

You need timely container information injected into your ERP, TMS, or other systems in order to remain competitive. The question is, do you buy a visibility data pipeline or build your own? Those who build their own significantly underestimate the cost and time to do so.

- Terminal availability, including holds, fees, and Last Day Free.
- Ship manifest data, including the port of lading, port of unloading, shipping line details, final destination, vessel, voyage, list of container numbers and types.
- Track all milestones, such as empty-out, empty-in, vessel loaded, vessel discharged, vessel arrived, full out, empty returned, and more.

THE BARRIERS TO GETTING VISIBILITY

The No. 1 barrier to getting reliable container visibility can be traced to the underlying container tracking data. Sure, the data is there ... somewhere. And it has been since the first intermodal shipping container set sail in the 1950s. Today, it is estimated that 80 percent of all goods traded globally are transported by sea, according to the folks at [Statista](#). One could surmise that, given today's shipping volumes, there's a mountain of data — maybe even an entire range of Mount Everests — just waiting to be transformed into actionable insights.

Here's the thing, though. To put it bluntly, container tracking data up to this point has been inaccessible and messy. Carriers traditionally provided container data only to "big" customers through EDI messaging. Everyone else was directed to the shipping lines' tracking websites, which meant operational teams spent up to 40% of their time collecting container data by hand.

The little data that is out there is “human readable,” but the leap the industry needs to make is getting the data to be “machine readable.” Much of digitization in the space has been a straight conversion of paper to PDF or the like, which is not truly data. A human can make sense of it, but a software solution can’t run on it; hence not machine-readable. The industry needs to bridge this gap to unblock innovation and proactively take the first step into a new generation of business efficiency.

“Everyone is going about it in a different way; they are all trying to carve out pieces of the pie. Their systems don’t talk to each other,” said VIZION’s Head of Sales Ben Tracy. “This is the crux of the problem for the supply chain. Everyone feels that siloing their data gives them stickiness or advantage or uniqueness. But what’s really happening is short-term gains at the expense of long-term return on investment. Data is hard to integrate across disparate systems.”

To summarize, the barriers to getting visibility include:

- Data is locked in silos
- No single source of truth
- No way to verify if the data is accurate
- Too many dashboards to manage

NO CONTAINER VISIBILITY = LACK OF CONTROL = BIG PROBLEMS

So much of today’s pain has nothing to do with prediction or low-quality forecasting. The most significant contributor to pain is the frequency and consistency of updates. Live tracking capabilities—that is, being able to access data as close as possible to the moment of generation at its origin—is the key. Increasing the depth, scope, and frequency of updates has the highest return value because the nature of supply chain is interruptions. Those who can best understand and respond to an issue the fastest have the advantage.

Here is how a lack of container visibility and control can affect supply chain stakeholders.

BCOS/SHIPPERS

Without knowing where your ocean freight is and when it will arrive, the problems grow by the minute:

- Products do not reach store shelves leading to lost revenue.
- Managing inventory becomes substantially more difficult.
- Purchase orders get canceled.
- Sales velocity decreases, revenue, and profits are lost.
- Customer satisfaction decreases or confidence is lost altogether.

If forwarders cannot tell you where, when, and why details about container status, your entire team must compensate to first find the data and then adjust to expected new arrival times. That is a lot of moving points, especially given the need to visit each carrier website to dig for details. Even then, there is no single source of truth and no way of verifying data quality.

3PLS/FREIGHT FORWARDERS

Without visibility and real-time tracking data, it's impossible to provide actionable feedback in a timely manner to keep your clients and operational teams informed of risks and disruptions.

If you can't provide answers to basic questions such as "Where is my container?", "When will it arrive?" and "Why is it late?" you're going to run the risk of letting down your BCO and shipper customers, which leads to a whole other set of issues:

- **Finding capacity** and securing actual bookings on vessels becomes even more difficult.
- **Costs will increase** due to using alternative transportation modes. These costs will vary, as air is more expensive and rail takes longer (rail is not an option, right?).
- **OTIF (On time, in full) rates will nosedive**, leading to unnecessary charges and damage to your reputation

- **Customer satisfaction will drop** and churn will likely increase.
- **Margins will erode**, leading to cost-cutting measures.

LOGTECH PROVIDERS

Unreliable and incomplete complete data analytics around containers does nothing to solve the angst of not knowing the ETA or other needs of key stakeholders. Without being able to integrate systems seamlessly, data remains stuck in silos and collaboration remains limited at best.

REGAINING CONTROL AROUND CONTAINER TRACKING

For all the use cases, barriers to visibility and problems presented up to this point, there is a universal solution available that would provide the real-time container tracking and data needed to put you back in control. Application programming interface (API) technology is helping to accelerate the pace of supply chain digital transformation by automating the gathering and standardizing of container-related data from across multiple systems into one easy-to-access single source of truth. Robust APIs provide you with:

- Standardized recording of milestones across all your carriers.
- Data that is not just filling in holes but joining other high-value datasets that fuel the use and therefore business cases of software features in the industry. This enriched data is ready for use in any application (ERP, TMS, etc.) or spreadsheet.
- Consolidated shipment and container overviews that are updated whenever there is a change in the underlying data.
- A greater level of confidence, knowing that ETAs are more precise and that actionable alerts will provide the insights necessary to mitigate disruptions or avoid them altogether.

You will have more time to run your business and focus on the projects that drive growth. Delight your customers with solutions that fit their needs. Finish tasks with minimal downtime or manual resources, freeing up time for other projects.

THE POWER OF CONTAINER TRACKING

Every shipment, large or small, matters. You would like to personally ride shotgun with each of them to ensure you have the latest updates and details. With APIs, it's as though you are sitting right alongside the container every step of the journey. Here are some of the many ways APIs can make life easier for BCOs, shippers, 3PLs, freight forwarders and LogTech service providers:

- **Gain strategic agility** – Shipment tracking APIs and real-time exception alerts help you make informed decisions when disruption strikes.
- **Share visibility via seamless integrations** – Using a cloud-based API, you can share real-time information for every container with each stakeholder's ERP, TMS, WMS or other systems.
- **Activate analytics pipeline** – Data can help you improve exception management, demurrage & detention, route optimization, and carrier selection & performance.
- **Develop alerts for exceptions & ETA changes** – An API with AIS tracking enables real-time alerts and updates that are automatically pushed anytime there is a change in data.
- **Develop visibility web apps** – Help Operations staff and customers help themselves to valuable information such as shipment status, inventory levels and more.
- **Identify potential detention & demurrage** – More clarity and vision helps stakeholders collaborate and take the necessary steps to reduce detention and demurrage fees.
- **Reduce manual errors** – Automation makes it easy to collect and share accurate, quality data and real-time statuses.
- **Generate robust reports** – Shipment tracking APIs can provide daily or hourly reports on container status using standardized data from a single source of truth.
- **Harness the Power of RPA** – Robust API connectors are critical in establishing RPA workflows that help ensure your data is ready for the jobs of today—and tomorrow.

HOW VISIBILITY LEADS TO BETTER DECISIONS

Making informed decisions with confidence will be much easier knowing that container tracking data is reliable, standardized, cleansed, readily accessible in a single pane of truth and in real time. This proves to be extremely beneficial when:

- Reacting to schedule changes.
- Dealing with blank sailings.
- Deciding the best way to manage a rolled cargo situation.
- Arranging drayage, based on the latest ETA.
- Adjusting schedules and staffing resources, once you know a shipment may be late.
- Dealing with port congestion.

Plus, being able to compare performance over time, across carriers, is a huge benefit to your decision-making efforts. Using data you can benchmark carrier information, which increases the significance and reliability of statistics that can be then used to gauge carrier/partner performance. This data can also be used in inventory management and planning and to drive improvements across the supply chain.



WITH VISIBILITY SOLVED, TEAMS HAVE MORE CONTROL

By automating shipping container delivery status through API, you are unquestionably the boss of your own data, no longer at the whim of a third-party gatekeeper of the data (in other words, the carriers). Now, you're able to be proactive rather than reactive, in a position to unlock real value and an ultimate ROI in many areas, including:

- **Personnel productivity:** reduced time and costs associated with manual tracking of containers, and reduced time/cost associated with idle drivers/trucks.
- **Customer experience:** consistent OTIF deliveries and ensuring everyone stays informed with the latest status and updates ensures happy customers.
- **Finance:** reduction in costs associated with inventory holding and lost containers.
- **Demurrage & Detention:** With access to the most current and accurate ETAs, supply chain partners proactively managed demurrage and detention costs.

Having visibility across all your carriers in one place (single pane of glass) leads to operational efficiencies. Greater control of your data also helps drive proactive planning while also helping you hold carriers and supply chain partners accountable.

CONCLUSION: BE IN THE KNOW AND IN CONTROL WITH API TECHNOLOGIES

It is probably a pretty common occurrence that you are either asking or are being asked questions like “Where is my container?” “When will it arrive” and “What will these delays cost me?” By not looking for new ways to enhance your service offerings, you’ll have no chance to stand out from the competition and provide clear differentiation in the eyes of your customers. The pain points you experience on a daily basis due to a lack of visibility and supply control will not just remove themselves from the equation. You have to make it happen or risk the chance that your customers will find another partner who better suits their needs. Organizations that cannot adapt simply won’t survive.

Are you ready to trade ongoing frustration and anxiety for more confidence and greater control over data and the supply chain? The VIZION shipment tracking API covers 97% of global container shipments by volume, which brings real-time alerts, insights, and tangible ROI to BCOs, shippers, freight forwarders, 3PLs, and LogTech providers alike. It’s time to take back control and power. Take the first step and schedule a demo today.

VIZION

Vizion is an API-based solution for ocean freight visibility. The company’s API helps logistics service providers, cargo owners, and other stakeholders act on their digital ambitions by integrating essential data and insights into existing enterprise systems and delivering a stronger customer experience. Vizion’s products include visibility APIs, data benchmarking, and enriched, accessible datasets built on fundamentally sound information technology infrastructures.

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