

The Quick Group IT Roundtable: The Show Must Go On

Among the many business lessons that moved from the back pages to headline news since the onset of the pandemic: the complexity and importance of maintaining the global supply chain—the lifeblood for all companies. Even during a pandemic, aircraft parts and life-saving cell and gene therapies still need to be shipped. That’s why the sophisticated technologies required to keep each part of the global supply chain must move seamlessly and securely.

Our panelists are all part of The Quick Group IT team, who support the company's four business units — [Sterling Global Aviation Logistics](#), [QuickSTAT Global Life Science Logistics](#) and [Quick Specialty Logistics](#). The four technology leaders who joined our dynamic virtual roundtable included:

- **Eric Bischoff**, Chief Information Technology Officer
- **Michael McNally**, Vice President of IT Product Management
- **Ed Wendell**, Director of User and System Support Documentation & Training
- **Bob Rottinger**, Director of IT Infrastructure and Compliance

Now, in Part 2 of this two-part series, “The Show Must Go On,” we pick up where Part 1 left off—gaining best practices from The Quick Group’s technology professionals and learning what all of that back and front-end expertise means for clients. And through it all, pushing for continuous improvement which is, in the words of one of our IT experts, is “constant and never-ending.”

Host Chris Riback kicked off this episode by asking Eric Bischoff about the best practices that remain top of mind for him, as we approach the one-year mark of the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here’s Part 2 of our IT roundtable discussion, “The Show Must Go On.”

Transcript

Among the many business lessons that moved from the back pages to headline news during the pandemic: The complexity and importance of maintaining global supply chains – the lifeblood for all of us from healthcare to biotech, aviation to high-tech and beyond – helping move products, aircraft parts, and even life-saving cell and gene therapies. Also in the spotlight: The sophisticated technologies required to keep each part of the global supply chain seamlessly active and secure.

In Part One of our Quick Group IT Roundtable – “Business Continuity Takes Center Stage” – we explored what it takes to maintain cutting-edge technologies and 24/7 supply chain service requirements during a pandemic.

Today in Part Two, “The Show Must Go On” we go further, gaining best practices from The Quick Group’s technology professionals learning what all of that back and front-end expertise means for clients. And doing this while constantly pushing for continuous improvement which is – in the words of one of our panelists– “constant and never-ending.

These panelists are all part of The Quick Group IT team, who support the company's four business units -- Sterling Global Aviation Logistics, Quick Specialized Healthcare Logistics, QuickSTAT Global Life Science Logistics and Quick Specialty Logistics. The four technology leaders who joined our dynamic virtual roundtable included:

- Eric Bischoff, Chief Information Technology Officer
- Michael McNally, Vice President of IT Product Management
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Now, here’s part two of our IT Roundtable discussion. We began by asking Eric Bischoff about the best practices that remain top of mind for him following so many months of the pandemic...

Eric Bischoff: That's never-ending, [00:36:00] we follow the constant, never-ending improvements. We've always operated that way. So this is just adding to it.

Chris Riback: And maybe then for the other folks, what are some of the areas that may have added to Eric's never-ending, always growing, always evolving list of best practices, Ed, I would assume that with your [00:36:30] quote, client base moving to your home offices and different locations, all of a sudden, there had to be some types of new best practices, or were the ones that you had in place, were they already applicable? Talk to me about what best practices might you have come away with, from going through this pandemic for so many months now?

Ed Wendell: Here's the thing, we really didn't have to change that much. [00:37:00] People were trained to react a certain way when there was a problem, how to get in touch with us, how to report problems to us. And that didn't change. We were trained to respond to problems, regardless of the time of day or night. And we were trained that when the problem we couldn't handle, to get someone who could get it fixed as soon as possible and get them up and running. So, that didn't change. What did change, and what [00:37:30] made it a little bit more difficult was, if someone was in an office at two o'clock in the morning, and suddenly they had trouble with their operating system, they could get up move to another terminal. They can't do that now, they can't do that.

Ed Wendell: So the thing that has changed for us is at two in the morning, that call which used to be a report that we would get to in the morning has to be gotten to right then. Because we've got somebody working and they need to [00:38:00] work, they need to answer the phone, they need to be on the computer. And that has to be taken care of right away. So I guess that was

the big adjustment for us is that 24/7, we no longer had the luxury a lot of times of saying, okay, we'll get to that when we can, we have to get to everything right away.

Bob Rottinger: I think that it's important to understand how we implement best practices. [00:38:30] I think the one best practice that I see us using is just managing the technology. And it's important to understand a year ago, in November of last year where we were, we started business continuity management calls, we increased our capacity, we increased the capacity of bandwidth into the data centers, into the major offices. [00:39:00] We doubled our storage. We upgraded all of our server capacity. We started the voice over IP implementation. We expanded the security platform on all of our laptops. We moved all of our shared files from our offices to the data center. And we started the switch from WebEx to zoom. And this was in November of last year where we didn't know anything about Coronavirus.

Bob Rottinger: [00:39:30] And then when it came time, March and April or May, we were in a position to focus on the effort of moving people out of the offices. So we didn't have to ask the questions before we press that button, are we prepared from a technology standpoint, because our best practice is to always manage technology. The only thing that we didn't have the best practice [00:40:00] to do was, now that we moved 300 people from the office to work from home, we basically had to manage their home networks, we had to manage when other local ISP would go down. And we had to figure out, if it was Comcast, because their problem at home became our problem. So, all this by managing technology [00:40:30] upfront, which is a parallel effort, not a serial effort, we were able to give us time to support enabling our users working from home.

Chris Riback: And Mike, what best practices did your customers expect, and how did you think about, what were you hearing from them, either directly from them, or maybe through Quick colleagues who would interact with them out in the field?

Michael McNally: So I think they expected [00:42:00] business, as usual, they expect it to maintain the same level of communication that we provided while everybody was in our control towers, and I don't think much has changed, we haven't really received any negative feedback of saying, we're not receiving the same amount of personal phone calls directly from our customer relations management team, or I haven't received this information, with Quick online, where we normally go [00:42:30] to monitor and track or package is not available.

Michael McNally: So these things we've worked on and had in place for many years has held up with this transition, not only for our teams internally transitioning to their own homes. But as well as our customers transitioning to their homes, and out of their offices, that our processes and our products are holding up in this [00:43:00] time and to the test of time to continue to serve our customers with that information that they expect.

Chris Riback: And so, now, maybe, let's think about going forward, let's think about the ways in which preparedness and continuity, business and redundancy was already built into the Quick systems, the ways in which COVID and the pandemic have evolved [00:43:30] client

expectations and requirements internally. And really think about the future. And I'm curious from each of you, and Eric, I'll start with you is, from a client's perspective, what are things that you want them to know about what Quick does so that you are able to successfully expect the unexpected?

Eric Bischoff: That this is a constant, never-ending and [00:44:30] we're always looking for more redundancy, more stability, so that we can serve them, the nature of our businesses, minutes count, right? Well, if you can pick up something five minutes sooner it makes a big difference as to whether you're going to make a flight or not. So, all the information is critical, and it needs to be live. And that's what we're doing.

Chris Riback: Is there an example by chance, did anything come up [00:45:00] over the last months that's coming top of mind where there was a client inquiry, continuity of business, "Hey, what's going on?" I know there are always emergencies, anything in particular that you heard from clients where you are able to respond with, "Well, here's what we have in place."

Bob Rottinger: [00:45:30] Again, I think we hear it definitely weekly, if not almost on a daily basis. Where we're constantly having questions or calls from our clients, one of our largest European clients, we had a meeting with their business continuity [00:46:00] team, and they ran us through their entire plan. We are such an important part of their supply chain, that they wanted to ensure that we knew what their business continuity plans were, and how they have [00:46:30] integrated us into those plans.

Bob Rottinger: Our clients and their expectations of business continuity on themselves is the same as they put on us. I think the principles still exist on business continuity, regardless of the size, as I said before, [00:47:00] it's about the confidentiality, the integrity, and the availability of data for our clients, and they implore us to have those same principles in place as well.

Chris Riback: In some ways, Bob, did that bring you closer to your clients, I mean, your processes definitionally are part of their global supply chains. So, you have to work already hand in glove with [00:47:30] clients to ensure that their businesses work. But did this in some way, bring you closer? Or was it that the benefit that you already had standard operating procedures around client touchpoints in place, and so yes, they had questions but you were able to answer those questions. How did the client relationship evolve, because of the continuity of business requirements that they had during the pandemic and have during the pandemic?

Bob Rottinger: [00:48:00] Well I think it was, again, it was eye-opening, that they would go to the lengths that they did to share their deep, detailed business continuity plans with us. So in one respect, they were very open and honest and forthcoming with what their plans are. And I think when they learned and saw what our plans are, and [00:48:30] the level of detail that we've gone through, I think they felt a synergy with us. It was a comfort, but at the same time, it was an anxious comfort. Because they realized where we fit in their supply chain. And they were happy that we have plans, we have them documented, we provided them with the

documentation. And at the same time [00:49:00] they're anxious for us to succeed. Because if we succeed with business continuity, so do they.

Chris Riback: And Mike, I'm wondering what you saw in terms of client engagement, the client relationship from a product point of view, during this period?

Michael McNally: Yes, everyone's busy, everyone's busy juggling a lot of this for every customer, and so the communication is [00:49:30] a challenge. One of my responsibilities and goals is to continue that communication channel with our customers to keep up and understand how their business is changing, and where we need to be and where we want to be.

Michael McNally: We have a great relationship with all of our customers and we treat this as kind of a team, we're invested in their product, just like they're invested in ours. So, [00:50:00] we do a lot of working together with integration, or just communication, and how do we not only develop features and additional tools for them, but also continue to keep our systems aligned so they have the ability to keep consistent visibility with their shipment, regardless of how [00:50:30] their processes have changed, or maybe ours have with these challenges.

Chris Riback: And maybe we can talk specifics, and I don't know, Mike, if this is going to be for you, or maybe for one of the other speakers in the group. But what has IT done or had to do in areas of tech differentiation, in terms of saving customers time, cost efficiencies, streamline visibility, I mean, you [00:51:00] talked about that a little bit earlier, Mike in terms of the supply chain. Maybe some business examples in pharma, I mean, thinking about the different areas that you guys cover and some of them were just mentioned a moment ago, but from pharma, and blood shipments and all the way to high tech, and the biotech, the requirements are so significant. They differ, certainly, if you're [00:51:30] shipping a kidney, there are obviously some real requirements about that.

Chris Riback: What have you been able to do, and Mike, we'll start with you, and then whoever around the panel has something to add around in areas of tech differentiation, to really answer those client issues.

Michael McNally: Yes, that could be a whole podcast in itself, we've done a lot. Biotech is selling gene therapy. [00:52:00] Clinical trials, these are major pieces of our verticals in our customers that we continue to meet their challenges as their culture and logistics evolve from integrating with their systems or their partner systems, for scheduling, canceling, rescheduling. With the selling gene therapy, it's scheduling and then a week later saying, well, the schedules change.

Michael McNally: So we've worked very hard at building these tools in our system, in our API services, to allow them to do that. And that goes all the way to the CRM to see that change, and adapt and change that logistics plan on [00:53:00] the fly and communicate that back to them. We saw that you've changed this schedule till next week, here's your new flight information. Here's the new expected delivery. Smart packaging, Asset Management has been huge for us. You have a lot of packaged units. And now people are starting to hear about this with the recent

Pfizer announcement of "Oh, how do you keep this product in this temperature range?" Well, there's a lot of companies that provide [00:53:30] these packaging units, and they have GPS embedded, they have temperature probes embedded. So how do you manage those? How do you just get that information to the customer of saying, "Here's where your package location currently is, here's the temperature," and then now we need to get that asset, once that product is delivered and those vials are taken out of the product of the packaging unit, how do we get that back into our system, so we can repeat the process and have that available for the next shipment.

Michael McNally: So we've developed [00:54:00] a lot of internal tools and a lot of systems to manage that, even down to permissions and customers' patient information. The clinical trials now are in the thousands. So we've had to modify our notifications, our online platform [00:54:30] to make sure that we are hiding specific information or protecting specific data depending on who's monitoring that job. So, there's just a scope, a large scope of all of our products, either both internally and externally, that are all connected together that we have been spending hours and days trying to [00:55:00] evolve for these new requirements.

Eric Bischoff: Yes and we've seen tremendous growth in cold chain management.

Chris Riback: And what are you thinking about that, Eric, because we all have read in the popular media, about the Pfizer vaccine, we've read about [00:55:30] the Moderna vaccine, we've read the different temperature requirements so far between the two vaccines, we'll see how that change or changes or what evolves. But how are you thinking about those types of requirements going forward?

Eric Bischoff: Well, the Pfizer product requires extreme levels of Cold Chain Management. That's a challenge for everybody. So that's one thing that's different.

Chris Riback: Yes. [00:56:00] And what else, in terms of the flexibility that Mike was talking about, and in terms of blinding information, is there adaptation to a new normal? Is there adaptation to new requirements that you're having to think about? Do you maybe review all of your standard operating procedures and the various functions [00:56:30] that you have in place, how is this new normal, and how are these new requirements helping push your thinking?

Eric Bischoff: Well, that blinding of the patient information and things like that, I mean, that's not exactly new to us, we've been doing this, but the amount of it has grown tremendously. And the complexity also has changed. And the complexity because you have [00:57:00] different departments and different companies who are looking at information, and some can see certain things and they shouldn't see others. So it's very granularly managed and profiled that way.

Chris Riback: And is it customized by the customer, I mean, you need to ensure that integrity I know, are on the margins, is that the customer requirements very different, [00:57:30] or the ways that you've already thought about it, and the procedures that you have in place, cover 95%, 99% of the customer requirements that come in?

Eric Bischoff: I think what we have in place covers probably most everything. What's different is we're finding ourselves having to also educate the customers as well, there's a lot of new companies that come online, and they [00:58:00] don't always understand the complexity of that as well. So we work together to make all of this happen.

Ed Wendell: Yes, we customized to the customer level, to the user level in some instances, it all depends on that customer's requirements. But we can get pretty granular in our permission levels, and what we want to show, display, provide to the user.

Chris Riback: As we [00:58:30] start to come to the close of this conversation, I'm curious really about two things. One is, what's next, what are you worried about next, what are areas coming down the pike that are top of mind for you to the extent that there are new things that you are thinking about? And perhaps relatedly, what advice would you give to our listeners? [00:59:00] There are so many different areas around preparedness that you've been discussing, external clients, people listening to this conversation would surely benefit from your insights. And Bob maybe we can start with you. Are there features coming down, requirements, challenges coming down the pike [00:59:30] that are top of mind for you?

Bob Rottinger: Well, it's really the change, the global change of how data privacy is going to impact our technology. Because the data privacy rules are fundamentally going [01:00:00] to change how we store, manage, protect data, regardless of where they are. So in other words, regardless of where the individual might reside, and it's going to change how we use our data, how we store our data, how many databases we have that have customer information in it.

Bob Rottinger: And then how [01:00:30] do we respond to customer inquiries to remove, delete or sanitize their data, because they can make that request at any time. And this is relatively been in place in the European Union, the US is much more relaxed, but soon we're going to have to meet those same requirements. But that's really, again, it's how do [01:01:00] we rewire our house with the lights still on? How do we approach business continuity, maintain our current technology that we have in place, ensure that we have adequate capacity, while at the same time preparing for these big data privacy rules?

Chris Riback: And you're talking about GDPR, is that correct? Bob Rottinger: Correct. Right.

Chris Riback: Which is what? That is the European set [01:01:30] of rules that have come out around data privacy, but not fully implemented yet or required yet in the US. But what I hear you saying is, these are the European rules, and you fully expect that these will grow. Are you having to implement that level of responsiveness, regardless of where the clients are, is that what you're saying?

Bob Rottinger: Well, there are data privacy [01:02:00] rules in place in the EU that affect, broadly our IT organization. I mean, it goes everywhere from, are employees trained on what data privacy is? And do we have backups in place, so that we can protect our customers' data

relative to privacy rules? [01:02:30] But those rules are not in place for the United States. So we have to apply the rules in the EU way that we conduct business here in the US because we're a global company.

Bob Rottinger: We're following the highest levels, regardless of whether they're needed here or not, we have to.

Chris Riback: That's what I would assume. [01:03:00] That sets the bar and then the requirement comes to jump over it. Ed, I'm wondering, from your point of view, in terms of potentially some advice for listeners, clients who are thinking about their own organizations, any tips, any highlights in terms of preparedness of employees?

Ed Wendell: [01:03:30] It 's always just expect the unexpected, as they say, to be prepared for anything and just react to situations as best as you can. We still don't know what's to come, you keep on hearing about the new normal, we don't know what the new normal is going to be, we don't know where we're going to be six months from now. [01:04:00] In my dream sometimes I get these fever dreams of Eric calling me up and telling me we got to move everyone back by tomorrow or something. We've got a lot of people to move back. And there's a lot of questions, how we're going to move people back if that's what we're going to do? We just don't know. We don't know where people are going to be because we don't know what circumstances are going to be on the ground. So, you have to keep flexible, you have to keep open-minded. You have to keep mobile and worry [01:04:30] about tomorrow, but we got to keep in the back of our mind that it's coming right at us.

Chris Riback: And if Eric is appearing in your dreams/nightmares, I'm sure Eric feels that, that's exactly where he ought to be. And he's glad that you're thinking about these issues 24/7, is that right, Eric?

Eric Bischoff: Well, we have a team that's worked together for a long time. So, [01:05:00] yes, we're thinking the same way.

Chris Riback: I'm sure you are.

Eric Bischoff: But we've always been in that mode. Like I said, I have a background in another industry prior to logistics, and which is where the saying the show must go on right, then we apply this here every day. So where we have a level of preparedness, we're thinking about this all the time. And we want our customers to know that we're here. [01:05:30] We're going to do whatever it takes.

Chris Riback: Eric, what should folks look for in a global logistics provider, particularly during COVID times?

Eric Bischoff: Flexibility, reliability, inventiveness. We're a pretty creative bunch.

Chris Riback: That creativity matters, not only potentially imagining [01:06:00] the challenges that might yet come up. But then I assume, responding creatively to the challenges that came up that nobody foresaw?

Eric Bischoff: Yes. Yes, exactly.

Chris Riback: Mike, anything from you, in terms of, I mean, everyone is thinking about the clients all the time. Obviously, so many of your products are sitting in client's hands, what would [01:06:30] your guidance be? What should folks look for in a global logistics provider, particularly during and we hope soon, very, very soon, immediately, after COVID times?

Michael McNally: Yes, I think, we talked about earlier, is that transparency, the communication, the transparency, because in our industry, and specifically, everything [01:07:00] needs to be there yesterday, so we need to continue, and we strive to continue to reassure our customers with our products of, our processes are in place, this is where your package is currently located, and using those new additional tools at our disposal, GPS, and different assets that we now have available [01:07:30] to us to continue to provide that to the customers.

Chris Riback: And any features, or concepts, or challenges coming down the pike that are top of mind for you?

Michael McNally: Yes, we have great products, we're working on some new products and new technology built on some brand new tech stacks that we have MVP coming [01:08:00] shortly. So, we're very excited. We've been working very hard through this, through the pandemic so far. We really kicked off our product right when it started to get pretty bad and things started to shut down. We had our kickoff first week of April. But since we were used to being a completely remote team, we kind of never lost our stride, and we should be having some of [01:08:30] these, MVP should be coming out shortly.

Eric Bischoff: Michael got some exciting new products coming online.

Michael McNally: Yes.

Chris Riback: Excellent. Excellent. Do you want to break any news right here right now?

Eric Bischoff: No it's a secret.

Michael McNally: So yes, both internal and external, some products that are just right around the corner?

Chris Riback: I had a feeling there would be a secret. What happened to the transparency, Michael? [01:09:00] And Michael, just to be clear, for anyone who isn't aware, you've used the term MVP, what is MVP?

Michael McNally: When you're developing a product, in your product development team bubble of developers and project managers, and design team, it's the best product ever, but you don't know until you get it out to that customer. So, you want to develop something [01:09:30] that's usable for the customer, but you get to them as soon as possible because they're going to give you that true feedback of what works, what doesn't, what they like, what they don't so you can continue to improve. There wouldn't be an iPhone 12 if they didn't get that first iPhone out. So that's our goal, is to get a product out, something that's usable. It's not going to have every single feature available, but it's something that they can give us that feedback and we can really see [01:10:00] where we're at that time.

Bob Rottinger: Well, everything that we've launched, we were pretty aggressively early in our industry. And we've been operating with those products, like I said, since 1990, and our ERP since 2000, on all of our online systems. And what we're working on now is like the next generation stuff that will take us into the next decade.

Chris Riback: [01:10:30] Well, the next generation and the next decade are where the focus is, I am sure because as you have pointed out, the show must go on. Unfortunately, this show must end. Eric, Mike, Bob, Ed, thank you. Thank you for your time. Thank you for your insights, particularly around ideas and what you've learned, that can help inform and increase confidence among [01:11:00] customers and clients globally. Thank you all for your time.

Bob Rottinger: Thanks, Chris. Ed Wendell: Thanks, Chris.

Michael McNally: Thank you.

Outro: That was Part Two of our Quick IT Roundtable. My thanks to Eric, Mike, Bob and Ed for joining, and you for listening.

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