

Intro/Outro ([00:03](#)):

Welcome to supply chain. Now the voice of global supply chain supply chain now focuses on the best in the business for our worldwide audience, the people, the technologies, the best practices, and today's critical issues. The challenges and opportunities stay tuned to hear from those making global business happen right here on supply chain now,

Kevin L. Jackson ([00:33](#)):

Good afternoon. This is Kevin L. Jackson presenting digital transformers. I'm serving as your host from Washington DC. Playing with my loyal wing man from Atlanta, Georgia is Scott Luton. Hi Scott, how you doing today?

Scott Luton ([00:49](#)):

I've been doing fantastic. And our weather here in the Atlanta area is almost as beautiful as it is up in your neck of the woods. So I'm looking forward to a great conversation.

Kevin L. Jackson ([00:57](#)):

Yeah, we're supposed to be hitting 76. I don't know, uh, what I'm going to do with myself. I'm not so happy. Winter is over with head to the beach, right? Yeah. Yeah. And today we're going to spend some time with Alex Jones from a T and T business. He focuses on supporting what's often referred to as quote, small and medium businesses. But according to Deloitte, there are about 29 million businesses with fewer than 500 employees in the United States. And it represents like 99.7% of all businesses and almost half of the total private sector employment that tells me that SMB is really important. Scott, what does SMB means to the supply chain, world? Everything,

Scott Luton ([01:49](#)):

Everything really innovation, flexibility, responsiveness, sheer volume. If you look at the backbone of the global supply chain, it's about moving freight, right? That's the backbone and overwhelming majority of our freight carriers, especially here in the States are small and medium sized businesses. So this is

Kevin L. Jackson ([02:04](#)):

Critical area. Okay, great. So please stay tuned for a wonderful discussion, but, but first I'd like to thank our sponsor digital names by total network services and quick programming note, before we get started, if you enjoy today's conversation, be sure to find us wherever you get your podcasts subscribe. So you don't miss a thing. Okay. With no further delays, let's bring on our featured guests, Alex Jones, the assistant vice president omni-channel at at and T business. Hi Alex. Thank you for joining us today. Hot things down in Dallas. Hey Kevin, J Scott, thanks for inviting me here. Things are great. Now that we have thawed Dallas winter weather, if you could send more of that 76 degree weather down here, we certainly wouldn't complain, but it looks, things are up

Alex Jones ([03:00](#)):

And up into the right and in Dallas right now.

Kevin L. Jackson ([03:03](#)):

Oh wow. That's great. There was some pretty scary pictures on the news a few weeks ago.

Alex Jones ([03:09](#)):

Yeah. A hundred hundred car pile ups, you know, tons of, uh, houses with pipes bursting. We're certainly not built for that type of weather here in Dallas. Not to mention the lack of electricity that, uh, was unprecedented and, uh, not something we're used to here,

Kevin L. Jackson ([03:25](#)):

But you know, what w w other other things we saw play out read about is a lot of good news restaurants, feeding folks had hot meals, uh, neighbors taking care of neighbors. There was a lot of really neat stories that came out of Texas in the last month or so.

Alex Jones ([03:41](#)):

Yeah, we had, um, there was some really touching stories to your point of team members, opening their homes to impacted colleagues and the family component and community within even our workforce, certainly pulled through and showed, showed their strengths throughout that, that challenging time.

Kevin L. Jackson ([04:00](#)):

Yeah. A real human spirit. So, so please introduce yourself and your role at, at and T business. I don't know, but for my education, I'd love for you to explain what Omni channel is. I mean, that sounds like a big word

Alex Jones ([04:15](#)):

Omni channel. It's all about meeting our customers where they'd like to be served and on the platforms in which they'd like to interact with us on. So my organization is primarily inside sales focused on not only just our small and medium sized businesses, but our mid-market and enterprise accounts, as well as our public sector and specialty sales teams. And so you can think of inside sales, being a catalyst of growth, especially a mid Panda or this pandemic, and our organization is set up to engage with customers who are actively engaging with us online, as well as serve up opportunities in a multiple different variety of platforms, whether that be via chat, whether that be enable customers to ask us to contact them on their time and on their terms in convenient schedules to them. Uh, in addition to real time, pick up the phone and give us a call through your traditional 800 type type engagements.

Alex Jones ([05:19](#)):

But the way in which we're organized within, within my team within omni-channel is specialty functions. So I mentioned digital sales. We have a alignment with we own relationships with over 700,000 small business customers within, at and T within my channel. And then we support from an inside account management function, our outside counterparts, who are those relationship owners with, you know, we'll call it over 2 million different customers across the at and T ecosystem. So to your point of small businesses being the, the vast of businesses, we couldn't agree more within the 18 T business environment. 99% of our customers fit that small, medium sized business category. And that's the organizations we primarily serve within omni-channel. But the best way to think about it is really finding ways to interact with these customers and new platforms, new techniques on our customer's terms,

Kevin L. Jackson ([06:23](#)):

Where you probably had your phone ringing all the time in 2020, because I mean, we all had to figure out how to shift to this, this new world, this new virtual worlds in 2020. Yeah.

Alex Jones (06:36):

I became our, our outside counterpart's best friends the past few months.

Kevin L. Jackson (06:42):

And that was really tough, uh, for all business, but especially small and medium sized businesses because they probably did. They depend on people being able to walk into their, uh, their store or their business. And, um, just being stuck at home know that's hard so that we, we see the light at the end of the tunnel. What does 2021 look like?

Alex Jones (07:09):

Yeah, I mean, 2020, we certainly saw a tale of two cities where certain businesses have been accelerated. Um, you can think about, you know, businesses that specialize in air filtering, sanitization products, um, tele-health right. Healthcare. We've really seen explosiveness in a variety of sectors. And then you look on the opposite end of the spectrum. And you look at hospitality, you look at transportation, you look at brick and mortar retail, certainly cop in a unique position, um, challenged in ways in which I don't think any of them have been challenged in the past, but what we did see is where savvy businesses use engine nudity and technology to regain that competitive advantage. I'd say that this year specifically for SMB, it's going to be the year of accelerated digital transformation technologies that were adopted for COVID 19 will be propelled. And I think you'll see this digital first or even a hybrid physical digital model, um, that has been introduced is really here to stay and connectivity e-commerce. And those who know how to succeed online are really going to continue to succeed into the future. And I think it plays nicely into this conversation of digital transformation, how that's defined very differently per business unit you look at and their sector and their models, but overall digital acceleration has certainly propelled many businesses throughout this time. And that's here to stay

Kevin L. Jackson (08:52):

That need for speed. I know, as a former Naval aviator,

Scott Luton (08:56):

I bet that's one of Kevin L Jackson's favorite phrases from the top gun days for speed, but, you know, there's never been perhaps never been a greater need for speed. And clearly what we picked up from you and appreciate the conversations is y'all is at, and T business's intense focus on delivering the best network and communication services globally, but, you know, when it comes to small and medium size businesses, what are some of those technologies involved? You, you alluded to a few, but expand a little more on that.

Alex Jones (09:22):

Yeah, there's a, um, you know, overall we are in the business of connections. So when you look at the platforms and the variety of business models, I can't think of a certain, a single business that isn't reliant on connecting, whether that be to their customers, whether that be to their suppliers, whether that be their employees. And so again, this year is, is again, propelling this accelerated connectivity discussion. The advances in five G will be your reality in 2021. I'll, I'll expand a little bit on that in a moment. Um, SD wan and software defined networking, and wide area networking and extending the way in which connections are beyond your single site locations to a distributed supply chain, as well as broad partnering with, with private connectivity is, is going to be critical IOT, continuing to accelerate with the connecting of things, machine, to machine connectivity, and then all of which coupled with cyber

security and that risk and exposure, continuing to ride with SMBs, being at the center of targeting for cybersecurity attacks.

Alex Jones ([10:40](#)):

These are the type of technologies I would say, small and medium sized businesses should plan for not only currently, but as we go into the future. And specifically, when you think about this pandemic and SU induced shift, I like to refer it to as an, of this remote work, we talked about how employees are now working from home. And the challenge associated with that, especially for SMB and contactless, commerce has underscored the importance of digital transformation to drive business agility and overall resilience, right? And so we know from our customer base that the shift to working from home at scale drove exponential increases in bandwidth and security requirements for many businesses that, you know, were, were again outside of their traditional infrastructure. Now we have employees at home competing for bandwidth, with e-learning students and children doing e-learning with video streaming, which continues to be on the rise.

Alex Jones ([11:44](#)):

And then, you know, we're all on a zoom bridge right now with heavy video conferencing. And so now we've got this competition for bandwidth. You mentioned, you know, speed need for speed need for bandwidth right now. And, uh, the way in which we approach that 18 T fiber network infrastructure, we continue to invest in and we're continuing to grow to bring more high-end reliable, resilient connectivity, and where we can't with the fiber infrastructure, our wireless network compliments, and certainly supplements in a variety of ways of now wireless broadband. We made some recent announcements with a wireless broadband and leveraging 5g to provide that wireless connection experience that you can now think about separating that home internet connectivity, and prioritizing differently, the business professional utilization and more personal and consumer utilization. So that's a little bit about where we see the technology going within 2021 and how at and T

Scott Luton ([12:48](#)):

So as a father of three, you're saying, I might can limit my kids' use of a fortnight absorbing all of that bandwidth to my ears is video video experience. Your crystal ball is working well. Her did course alluded to 5g has been neat as a, as a consumer and a phone customer to see that flip over from 4g to 5g and it stay right there and see the speed there. SD when you mentioned IOT blockchain, where if you could expand a little bit more about where especially blockchain and, and still there's others and where it really fits in the small and medium sized business plan for 2020.

Alex Jones ([13:26](#)):

Yeah. I mean, again, blockchain is, it's a interesting area to follow right now and general cryptocurrencies and the impact on SMB is kind of a fascinating one. I'd say in general, I'd look again at that requirement for connectivity and then man, cyber security, couldn't be more important specifically. I mean, I wrote down a few stats that I thought would be helpful to share with the audience on, on cyber specific for SMB. So we are expecting by 2021, the cybersecurity impact from a damage perspective is expected to reach over \$6 trillion this year. And not surprising given that 50% of the users would click a link from unknown centers. The majority of IOT devices reduce overall security. So when you think about the human component of being that exposure or with the adding to the risk, as we look at IOT and machines connecting the reduces, believe it or not the, the overall risk, but 43% of overall cyber attacks are aimed at small businesses.

Alex Jones ([14:44](#)):

And 58% of malware attacks specifically are directed at small businesses. Last stat I've got is 90% of CEOs state that their cyber security budget is spent most inefficiently and what keeps them up most at night. And so you look at, you know, a lot of our larger businesses have been able to at least create policy protocol guidelines, expertise to staff and, and, and have that, um, overall, uh, protection built in house at scale, the small and medium sized businesses don't technically have that typically don't have that luxury. And so, um, companies like at T and T who can help not only identify threats and risks within their infrastructure, but then provide solutions to mitigate and also reduce overall impact. It's a certain growth area for us right now in an area which we're really taking a leadership role in because the, the requirements and need for small business expertise in this area is so high.

Kevin L. Jackson ([15:51](#)):

Yeah, I know you're, I mean, there's two things that you have said that it, uh, is sort of stuck out to me first that the bad guys are getting really, really good at fooling you. I mean, social engineering, I'm, you know, I'm a professional, I call myself a professional and he's emailed to coming in and I can't tell if it's real or fake. Okay. You know, I'm looking at it and, you know, you hover over something and you just sort of pray. I mean, this, the security thing is, is I'm glad to see, you know, I've seen at and T really step up when it, when it comes to, uh, security and you have some business connectivity at home, some of the solutions there that helps security. And, and the other thing this is for Scott, Scott, I think I'm going to have to change the name of the show to a digital acceleration digital transformation, but really getting back to the topic, we will also be talking to small businesses really are naturally focused on recovering from this pandemic. So how can digital transformation or digital acceleration help them with their recovery efforts?

Alex Jones ([17:12](#)):

So, from my perspective, there's a few pieces of literature I've been keeping up on, um, on this topic, when we think about entering the recovery phase, right? And you mentioned the light at the end of the tunnel, we've seen vaccinations, accelerate cases declining and, or starting to get, I'd say back to what will be a new normal. I think the normalcy is evolving. And our definition of that, even as we exit this, you know, this moment right now, but the few things that stick out to me. So for COVID, since we it's, let's call it, it's actually been tomorrow is a year from when we sent our employees home at, at and T for a work from home environment, um, at the onset of the pandemic within the United States. And since then, since then, we've noticed that 47% of buyers are doing the majority of purchasing online.

Alex Jones ([18:09](#)):

And that's 77% of our purchasers enjoy a omni-channel type of engagement optionality, whether that be the option to go into a store, whether that be the option to call in or the option to digitally interact with us without any type of voice or physical presence. And Gardner actually expects that by 2025, 80% of B2B small business interactions between suppliers and buyers will occur on digital channels. So the impact is that any businesses are now having to adjust how they interact with their customers vendors. And this adjustment really is making businesses three, think about leveraging technology differently, but to work and sell remotely, which has resulted for us a significant growth in wireless connections, a greater use of our internet products. And then, uh, you know, as we mentioned, explosive usage of zoom and WebEx and, you know, collaboration solutions so that we can remain the stay coupled and connected while even not being physically, physically together.

Alex Jones ([19:23](#)):

So again, digitally savvy businesses are the ones to beat in 2021. These are the ones who've adapted their business models to, to really meet this changing landscape and to F to become the new normal, because customers are deepening loyalty and are meeting their suppliers again, when it's convenient and they feel, they feel as though it can be trusted from that security component. So I'd probably just end that the emphasis on this enhanced customer experience and then is, is really requiring sound digital strategies with high speed, low latent connectivity, and SMBs will continue to turn to fiber based services for reliable ultra fast ultra high bandwidth needs to support not only their extended customer experience, this video conferencing, but also sharing a lot of this heavy data, rich material and media and media content that now we come to expect. Right. Um, so this recovery phase is really, again, focusing on what has been accelerated for those that's worked and adapted quickly, and then taking it to the next level while bringing back probably some best practices that might still remain with folks becoming comfortable interacting with one another.

Scott Luton ([20:48](#)):

Again, you know, for all the change you describe, one of the huge Constance is we've got to protect the global and, and certainly the, the domestic supply chain of critical goods, right? That's certainly been one of the silver linings. Independent is, is a renewed in a, in a re-invigorated appreciation for all the folks that make that happen, right? Make supply chain happen, but also along the similar lines of big awareness of why supply chains matter. And in every consumer's mind, we all, probably for the first time in our lifetimes, we saw some things that stores empty shelves and some cases that was our, our stark reality of what the, what the threat can be, right when things break down, frankly. But so with that renewed interest on protecting, especially the national supply chain and critical goods, Alex, what do you think that means for small and medium-sized businesses?

Alex Jones ([21:40](#)):

Yeah. A great question, Scott. I, you know, everyone right now is asking the same question around where is not only my supply, but where is everything? Where are my employees? Where are my customers? Where's my supply, where's my stuff. I mean, shoot, you can even ask Alexa in your house, where's my stuff. And so supply chain once invisible to most is probably top of mind for businesses, large and small, as well as consumers. And so I'd say for SMB to take, I I'd recommend taking really proactive, proactive steps to ensure they have a really clear picture of where supply chain exists and adopt a few things to miniaturize, to minimize disruptions in the future. A few things I might, I might add. So knowing where your suppliers, where your suppliers are and where your stuff is, many small businesses hand over control to a third party for their supply chain, which leads to a significant loss of visibility and factors that can affect their product and in turn your supply.

Alex Jones ([22:50](#)):

So, and then to digitalize your supply chain tracking supplies digitally far more efficient than a manual model, um, adding redundancy. So across the supply chain with multiple suppliers can also ensure reliability. And then sustainability is really fundamental, honestly, including basics like packaging sizing, over deliver devices to our stores, to our customers. And then I'd say last, and certainly not least diversifying the overall supply chain COVID, but really, and before is, is impacted ton of tariffs on our, on our supply chain. And specifically Chinese products were remainder a need for our geographical and geopolitical balance. So over the past decades, our global so up supply chains push for lowest possible cost is led to probably an overconcentration of suppliers in certain regions. So it doesn't mean you care

about cost or efficiency or aggregating your purchasing, but really the balance is shifting more towards resiliency redundancy. And then we're at T and T really can help with all the above is visibility and that connectivity and especially the IOT application here of being able to track supply product and ways in which we probably hadn't been as laser like intentional on in the past,

Kevin L. Jackson ([24:11](#)):

Right. Kevin has I passed the Baton back to you. One last thing that comes to mind as Alex was sharing his perspective, there is here in the information age, we've got an information supply chain we've got to protect and also grow and be able to move faster and faster. Right? Yeah. That's really critical and wonder things that I was kind of interested in learning more about is Alex was talking about how businesses have to digitize their, uh, digitize their supply chain, uh, because more and more businesses and customers want to have that optionality, uh, want to be able to do that. So, I mean, what are maybe specific technologies that, uh, uh, small and medium sized businesses need to think to implement? I know you mentioned SD wan in general and 5g, but you know, what do they need to look up on the internet and installed tomorrow?

Alex Jones ([25:12](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Well, specific to 5g, I mean, that will deliver really low latency, high speed and bring forth innovative ideas that will ultimately enhance our ability to track items, improve inventory management and streamline the overall logistics operations. And I think that you're going to see the business applications of 5g accelerated prior than a consumer application of watching, downloading that movie that much faster on a device. It's really the, you look at autonomous cars now becoming a thing of possibility because of the low latency connection, a car being able to read a, perhaps a human in front of it, and being able to real time adjust and stop and avoid the type of accident had there not been a kind of activity like the degree in which 5g deliver that would not be possible. So applying machine learning, you can really judge the overall risks of the supply chain, which sometimes aren't apparent until after the fact.

Alex Jones ([26:23](#)):

So in the meantime, IOT solutions are really, what's going to enhance that visibility. I mentioned earlier where we're at at and T we're using IOT to make our supply chain more efficient. For example, through near real-time monitoring of our vehicles and our, of our drivers and trips to glean data-driven where is route management efficiencies, where are, you know, diagnostics of our, of the machines that we're actually monitoring and driving and, uh, increasing our dual sourcing of products and raw materials, um, specifically with an inventory of critical products, more near shoring and regionalized supply chains, which, um, warehousing inside supply chain closer to your business is certainly something that we're, uh, we're, we're not only practicing in house, but in, but advocating for outside help Kevin.

Kevin L. Jackson ([27:18](#)):

Oh yeah, absolutely. I, I, what, uh, here is that 5g is foundational to not only surviving, but thriving and in 2021,

Alex Jones ([27:31](#)):

It's going to be that next innovation cycle of things that we wants to not. Um, we, we known to never thought about this becoming a calculator or a video viewing device 5g will, will continue to propel new

use cases, new applications, um, and, and frankly change the way in which we live. And, uh, that's exciting.

Kevin L. Jackson ([27:56](#)):

Yeah, it really is. So really thank you for that. Alice is sort of a vision and to not the future, but the present. Right. So, so how can a business owners and managers get in touch with you to learn more about how at and T business can support them in this, um, digital acceleration year?

Alex Jones ([28:20](#)):

Yeah, there's, there's a variety of ways. I would first recommend any business, smaller, large find us online at [ap.com/business](#). Uh, we even have a specific small business section of our website at [att.com/small business](#), um, where we outline all of these use cases of technologies specific and pertinent to small businesses. I mentioned our new fiber fast fiber infrastructure build outs. All of those addresses in our infrastructure build can be qualified online, our 5g and all of our mobility opportunities also can be found online. And then there's a way in which you can engage specifically with my team on those digital assets, whether you want to click to chat with us, give us a call with one of the a hundred numbers, or again mentioned, there's a way in which you can ask someone to give you a call at your own at your own convenience. So encourage you all to check us out online and engage with us. We're here to help you and your businesses not only react, but plan for the accelerated change of this digital transformation. And an ATT has a variety of solutions that is not a one size fits all. We take a catered approach to every business because the applications are so unique.

Kevin L. Jackson ([29:39](#)):

Oh, I love that optionality. That's great. Thanks a lot. And, and on that note, uh, be sure to check out a wide variety of industry thought leadership@supplychainnow.com and you can find us and subscribe wherever you get your podcasts from. So on behalf of the entire team here at supply chain now, and this is Kevin L. Jackson, Scott Luton, and Alex Jones wishing all of our listeners a bright and transformational future. We'll see you next time on digital transformers. Thanks everybody.

Intro/Outro ([30:21](#)):

Thanks for being a part of our supply chain. Now, community check out all of our [programming@supplychainnow.com](#) and make sure you subscribe to supply chain. Now anywhere you listen to podcasts and follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. See you next time on supply chain. Now.