# Shipping industry urged to accelerate AI adoption to boost productivity and innovation



The global shipping industry is being urged to accelerate its adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) to unlock opportunities for increased productivity, innovation, and growth, according to Brian Hack, Managing Director of freight forwarding company EES Shipping. Hack’s call to action comes in the wake of the 2025 MHI Annual Industry Report, which surveyed over 700 supply chain leaders worldwide, revealing that only 28% currently utilise AI technologies. The report highlighted key barriers including a lack of understanding, unclear business cases, and budget constraints.

Speaking to ChannelLife New Zealand, Hack emphasised the challenge the shipping sector faces in integrating AI into its longstanding operational methods. "One of the major challenges I believe comes from within the industry itself. We're trying to implement relatively new technology into what is arguably one of the oldest industries in the world," he said. Hack noted that the global supply chain has seen little fundamental change over recent decades, raising questions about how new technologies such as AI can be effectively incorporated into existing frameworks.

A particular obstacle Hack identified relates to data and documentation standards in shipping. While the sector generally operates with similar datasets, he pointed out that slight variations between them pose difficulties for AI programme compatibility. "While the global industry operates under largely the same data and document sets, the slight variations currently make it difficult for AI programs to accommodate," Hack said. He argued that enhancing standardisation of data could unlock efficiencies, especially in areas such as data entry and document reading.

The industry’s ageing workforce also presents challenges in embracing new technology, according to Hack. He explained that older demographics may be more hesitant to adopt AI, underscoring the importance of comprehensive training and education. "We need to make sure we're offering adequate training and education so employees can see the potential benefits and opportunities technology presents, rather than being fearful or concerned," he added.

Hack outlined several key areas where AI could transform the shipping sector. In terms of operational efficiency, AI can automate data processing, cross-checking, and accelerate approvals while reducing errors. He also highlighted AI’s potential for innovative uses such as data analysis, trend prediction, supporting sustainability initiatives, enhancing tracking systems, and personalising customer experiences. "I'm sure there are ways we can implement AI to our advantage that we haven't even considered yet," he remarked.

The topic of attracting younger talent was another area Hack linked to AI adoption. He noted that younger workers, familiar with technology in their daily lives, may be deterred from joining the shipping industry if it does not offer comparable technological environments. "Younger workers have grown up with technology embedded in their everyday lives. How can we encourage them into our industry if the technology isn't up to the standard they already know exists?" he asked.

While acknowledging concerns about job losses due to automation, Hack expressed confidence that AI would create new roles and opportunities. He illustrated this by recalling the disappearance of ‘runner’ roles, replaced instead by specialised IT staff—positions that did not exist two decades ago. "It's about working smarter and thinking of different ways of operating," he said.

Hack issued a strong warning about the consequences of lagging behind in AI adoption. "Sectors that are embracing AI technology are moving ahead and making significant progress. Some may say that if the supply chain doesn't take meaningful steps to implement AI the industry will be left behind, however I would argue that we're already behind now, and we need to catch up sooner rather than later."

The ChannelLife New Zealand report underscores the growing need for the shipping sector to adapt and innovate through AI, highlighting both current gaps and future possibilities for the global supply chain industry.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

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