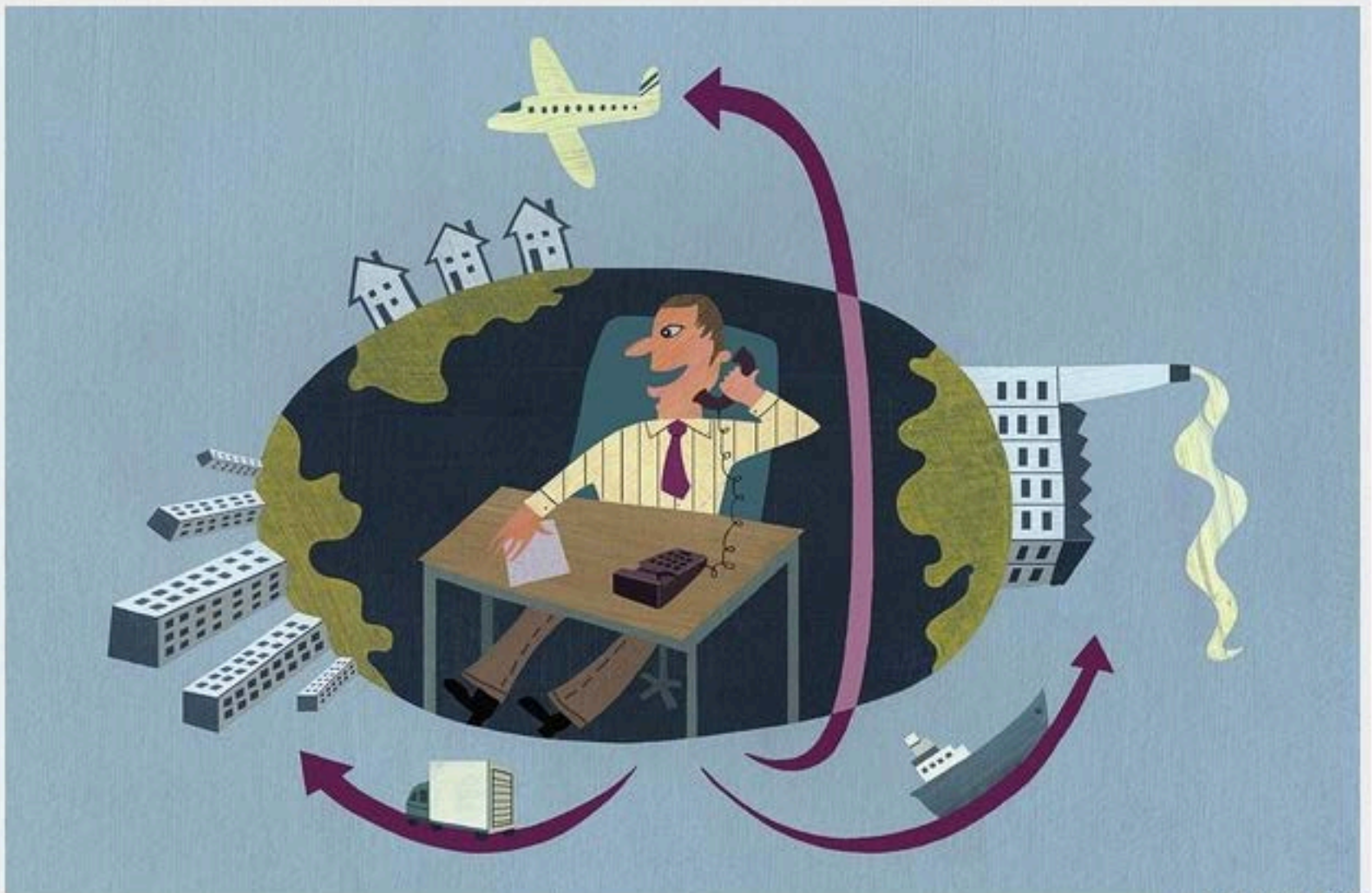


The NE Ohio supply chain industry is trying to meet strong demand

By TIMOTHY MAGAW

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Skilled choreographers are in high demand — not so much the kind that pieced together Katy Perry's shark-filled Super Bowl glam fest, but those who coordinate the complex, yet under-the-radar, journey that bring goods to people's doorsteps or store shelves.

Local colleges and universities say their grads in supply chain management and logistics are in hot demand, and the enrollments in their programs have begun to reflect as much.

Take the University of Akron's 9-year-old supply chain/operations management program, which has nearly doubled in size since 2012 to more than 100 students.

These folks manage the entire life cycle of a product: sourcing raw materials, managing warehouses and making sure things end up where they're supposed to. Smucker's, Swagelok, Goodyear and Audio-Technica are just a few of the companies that have scooped up Akron's grads.

"People are recognizing that supply chain can be a strategic part of the business," said Richard Sprungle, vice president of operations of Audio-Technica's U.S. subsidiary, which is based in Stow.

"In the past, we just had to ship our product," he said. "Customers are becoming much more demanding. They want it shipped a certain way, labeled a certain way and have it on a certain date. We're not just hiring someone to put it in a box and ship it out the door. There's more thought put into it."

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects 22% growth — much more than other categories — in supply chain-related jobs through 2022.

Also, the median wage for all logisticians hovers at almost \$72,800, and Akron's recent grads reported earning, on average, \$51,600 right out of school.

Part of the reason for the field's rapid growth, experts say, is that more companies are relying on other firms around the world to do business. The phrase "global economy" often is tossed around by academics and industry types when discussing the need for supply chain grads.

"As the economy's come back, demand picks up, and there's a need to move more product and source more materials," says Mahesh Srinivasan, coordinator of UA's supply chain program.

"You can have good people, a great designed product and access to financing, but if you can't figure out a good way to get materials to make the product and get it to the customer, the reason for your organization goes away."

The need for supply chain professionals is so high that in 2013, Don Delaney, Goodyear's vice president of global supply chain and logistics, reached out to the University of Akron for help in building a pipeline of workers for his division. The result was a University of Akron-centric internship program. In many cases, those internships have turned into full-time job offers, Delaney said.

Nationally, the pool of qualified supply chain professionals isn't keeping up with demand. Researchers from Penn State's Center for Supply Chain Research, for instance, said in a recent report that a "perfect storm could be in the offing" when it comes to talent pipeline.

Other recent news events highlighted the importance of a well-oiled supply chain.

Take Target, which last month announced plans to shutter all 133 of its Canadian outposts because of supply chain gridlock. Goods were reportedly coming into the warehouses faster than they were being shipped out. The retail giant was unable to resolve the issues and opted to cut its losses.

"Bad logistics can screw up good marketing," said Paul Murphy, a professor of business logistics at John Carroll University, which boasts a small logistics program of about 20 students. "You can have a good price, good product and a wonderful promotion, but if it's lost, damaged or doesn't get there all that other stuff is for naught."

Over the last five years, Cleveland State's supply chain management program, too, has grown to one with more than 200 students, according to Oya Tukul, who chairs the supply chain management department. It's not just manufacturers like Parker Hannifin or Eaton hiring Cleveland State's grads. She said Cleveland Clinic and MetroHealth have even brought on supply chain grads to work in their operations departments.

"You're going to see more programs like ours," Tukul said.

"There's been incredible growth in Northeast Ohio. Mine grew because of the demand, and we're hoping for even more students."



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