



# Jumping In: Embracing Technology in the Supply Chain

Through a series of emerging technologies workshops that the Canadian Supply Chain Sector Council hosted in early 2018 across Alberta, we learned that many small and medium-sized businesses don't know how or where to start to upgrade the technologies they're using; they're afraid of making the wrong move or jumping in too soon.

In the past, change happened over a longer period, and it was often prudent for businesses to adopt a “wait and see” approach in the face of new technologies, particularly when multiple technologies were competing for market share. It often made sense to wait for a “winner” to emerge, rather than taking the risk of investing early in a technology that might ultimately fail.



This is no longer the case. Studies by the McKinsey Global Institute have concluded that the first-mover advantage for transformative technologies is so profound that late adopters may find that the game has left them behind and that they will be unable to catch up competitively. “Wait and see” is not a viable strategy when technology is changing as rapidly as is currently the case.

**This case study looks at the success one Canadian company has achieved by embracing technology; it illustrates how jumping in to adopt, and regularly updating, technology have made that success possible.**

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## Case Study: Trailer Canada Inc.

### The Challenge?

Founded in 1990, Trailer Canada Inc. was a small company selling trailers and parts in St. Paul, Alberta, two hours northeast of Edmonton. With a trading area that he estimates at just 30,000 to 40,000 people, owner and president Ronald Belzil was keen to reach customers outside the area in order to sustain and grow his business.

### The Solution

When websites were still “a very new concept,” says Belzil, he chose to create a site to enable advertising beyond his company’s local market. This step meant a lot of learning for Belzil – about computers, file formats, computer languages and programs – and a lot of work, first to determine what he needed and who could help him make it happen, then to plan, set up and maintain a site with loads of pages for the hundreds of items the company sells.

Belzil needed to make a “psychological commitment” to the new technology. In addition to learning about the technology itself, he had to understand the new marketing strategies and techniques that having a website would enable. He’s had to learn about graphic design, data analysis, freight management and e-commerce over the years since he launched his first website. Being amenable to and positive about implementing the technology and all that has involved has “opened up the business to the world,” says Belzil, whose company now sells to customers across Canada and around the globe.

## JUMPING IN: EMBRACING TECHNOLOGY IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN CASE STUDY: TRAILER CANADA INC.

Now in its third iteration, the Trailer Canada website has become increasingly complex, as the technology has changed and customers' expectations have risen. The site is more interactive, with more products than ever. It also provides tips and recommendations for users, an added-value feature to attract potential customers, share expertise and make the site "memorable," says Belzil.

"Whatever is out there that makes sense is definitely something we [will] look at."

—*Ronald Belzil*

With the development of each new version of the site, Belzil and his team have had to add to their skills and knowledge. Belzil has also had to hire more employees as the website has enabled the growth of his business. He's even hired a full-time graphic artist, certainly a job he never expected – when he started a

trailer business – to have to fill. He anticipates needing yet more people as the company continues to expand its online presence.

Approached by Amazon, Trailer Canada recently launched an account on that site, starting a trial with just a few dozen parts for sale. Belzil is excited to be part of Amazon, with the potential it offers for high-volume sales. Through yet more research, he has discovered several niches on the site where he believes his company can be very competitive.

Belzil says his company probably wouldn't still be around if he hadn't embraced technology. Doing so provided a means to survive in a small town, with a small market for the products he sells. While he emphasizes that it takes a lot of work to develop and maintain a strong website, he also says the work pays off. And, unlike with newspaper and radio ads, he says, a website provides data feedback that indicates what's working; statistics show which product pages are most visited and thus what customers are most in need of, even when they don't make purchases. He can use that information to guide decision making on product selection, pricing and promotional spending.