



BLUE RIDGE

EBOOK

7 Essential Elements of Demand Forecasting, Planning & Replenishment

Be Supply Chain Invincible with the 7 Essential Elements
of Supply Chain Planning

INTRODUCTION

The 7 Essential Elements: Transform Your Business with Supply Chain Planning

At Blue Ridge, we provide our customers with a simplistically elegant and powerful Supply Chain Planning solution. Key features include AI-driven ultra-precision Forecasting and Demand Planning that is harmoniously combined with accurate, machine learning-driven Supply Planning.

If you are a manufacturer of products for local or global markets, a distributor or a retailer aspiring to achieve world-class service levels and higher margins and profits to allow freed-up cash to fuel the further growth of your company, Blue Ridge is here to help you.

No matter how complex, multi-faceted and multi-echelon your supply chain is, and no matter how complex the demand patterns or intricate the logistics that you need to solve are, Blue Ridge's native cloud-based solution can manage it all.

The Blue Ridge Supply Chain Planning solution has been designed by buyers – for buyers – just to make sure that we plan in a way that is natural for the buyer community. Aside from having a simplistically elegant solution to an often-complex problem, we have condensed supply chain planning into a best practice process that mirrors the way a planner plans and works to perfection.

At Blue Ridge, we refer to these as the 7 Essential Elements of Supply Chain Planning, and it serves as the foundation for our solution, and your path to supply chain invincibility. This eBook dives deeper into each element so you can learn more about our approach.

Here is the process:

1. Demand Forecasting
2. Lead Time Forecasting
3. Order Cycle Optimization
4. Safety Stock & Service Level Management
5. Automated Ordering
6. Special Orders
7. Order Constraints Validation



By the end of this eBook, we hope you will find this process is easy and quite comprehensible. Implementing this approach not only cultivates heightened control and efficiency but also unlocks a significant amount of time and provides enhanced control for both buyers and planners. This newfound freedom allows them to delve into strategic activities such as Sales and Operations Planning (S&OP), fostering collaboration among teams and refining assortment planning to better meet the ever-evolving needs and preferences of customers. By incorporating this approach, organizations can optimize their operations, streamline their processes, and drive greater success in their business endeavors, leading to increased customer satisfaction, improved profitability, and a competitive edge in the market.

When you work with Blue Ridge, you'll not only experience software that exponentially improves the precision of your supply chain planning, you will also experience a partnership committed to your success. Our unmatched LifeLine team provides regular coaching sessions that will help get you the most value out of your Blue Ridge software and simplify buying complexity. We'll stand by you so that you can **Be Supply Chain Invincible**.



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1. Demand Forecast

A successful supply chain starts with a good forecast and a precise demand plan. Achieving this has become a balancing act of art and science requiring three key components:

Advanced Solution

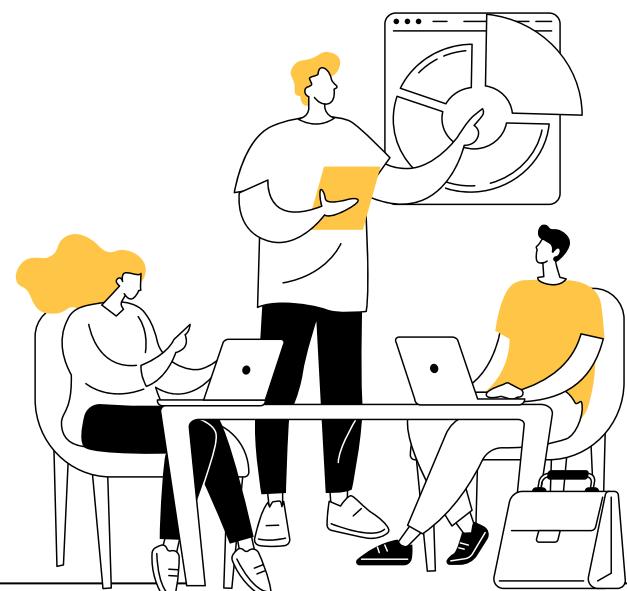
Demand planning solutions powered by AI, machine learning (ML), and the cloud bring an advanced approach by leveraging technology and data science to:

- Generate more accurate forecasts
- Easily identify seasonal items
- Work hand-in-hand with suppliers in real-time
- Order at the best possible time to minimize costs
- Eliminate the negative impact of erratic lead times
- Automatically determine which items to adjust
- Find the right smoothing model
- Measure accuracy using pattern-matching algorithms
- Automate forecasts for the entire portfolio of SKUs
- Maintain or even improve service levels with less inventory

Inventory Management Team

Top performing inventory management teams let their advanced forecasting solution do the heavy lifting, empowering them to take a more strategic role through advanced analytics, including the following:

- Measure results and know key inventory analytics numbers.
- Measure forecasting accuracy by item categories and suppliers
- Review and respond to unique inventory sectors
- Analysis by item type – for example: if slow moving/seasonally profiled items are having trouble, new items without Seasonal Profiles might also need attention.



The Blue Ridge Approach

Most of our customers have thousands of items. Those items have extreme volume differences, unique demand patterns, and often surprising seasonality. Your forecasting methods must be just as unique and diverse. One formula and one forecasting method simply won't keep up.

Blue Ridge's demand forecasting process starts with the collection of customer data. The solution cleanses the data to determine the influence of stockouts, anomalies, shifts in demand, and events. The next step is model training. Blue Ridge throws a multitude of forecasting models at the problem, and our Machine Learning (ML) algorithms are designed to uncover associated variables and choose the optimal model for each item.

Blue Ridge also assesses seasonality which includes weekday and seasonal effects, unexplained trends, and abrupt demand changes to produce precise daily forecasts. This will identify and create seasonal forecast or profile for any items with any level of seasonal pattern. Your team can apply unique profiles on items, as well as category or group profiles as needed for new items, slow movers, and other seasonal items. With an AI-powered platform, the tool is continuously learning and blending models to reach even higher levels of precision and agility.

Results of a Success

According to an independent Gartner study (unaffiliated with Blue Ridge), with every 1% improvement in forecast accuracy, companies on average realized the following:

- 7% reduction in finished goods inventory (days)
- 2% reduction in transportation costs (% of sales)
- 9% reduction in inventory obsolescence (% of inventory value)

Blue Ridge customers have exceeded these expectations, experiencing results like 41% forecast accuracy improvement, \$4M savings on transfer cost, and 70% increase in inventory turns.

 **7%**

reduction in finished goods inventory (days)

 **2%**

reduction in transportation costs (% of sales)

 **9%**

reduction in inventory obsolescence (% of inventory value)

2. Lead Time Forecasting

Lead time forecasting is a critical and often overlooked component of demand planning and replenishment. A strong lead time forecasting process analyzes the main receipt history and offers a supplier, or even item-level, lead time forecast. We can break down successful lead time forecasting by emphasizing three key areas:

Data Inputs

Just like in demand forecasting, gather as much lead time history as possible. Your data is extremely valuable. Years of lead time history and real-time analysis will allow you to put inventory behind the winning SKUs.

- **Lead Time Forecast:** Start with the actual lead time forecast value, but don't stop there. Offer as much history as possible. An intelligent forecasting method will tell you how much to use for each supplier and item.
- **Lead Time Deviation:** The deviation describes the reliability of the supplier and their performance. Similar to the demand deviation, the higher the lead time deviation, the more safety stock will be required. This additional safety stock becomes part of the inventory operating expense and will negatively impact the profit of an item.
- **Lead Time Seasonality:** Seasonal changes in deliveries from weather conditions, supplier plant shutdowns, employee vacations, etc. need to be considered during the safety stock calculation process to help you react accordingly.

Advanced Operational KPIs

Top inventory management teams will keep track of these Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as triggers to take action to enhance, refine and sharpen the forecast accuracy:

- **Cost of Increased Supplier Lead Times:** When suppliers suddenly struggle, and your lead time forecasting response slows, there is a precise financial burden to the new normal. Your forecasting tools should show the cost of carrying that excess inventory and serve as leverage to redeem that cost in the form of pricing, a bill-back, or some other agreement.
- **Supplier Performance:** If your mission and promise is to deliver 98% service to your customers, and your suppliers service you at 96%, you need tools to visualize the impact of that gap value. There should be a rolling supplier service % calculation and you should receive automatic alerts when the value changes.
- **Average Lines per PO:** The size of the orders will influence your receiving schedules. As you adjust your replenishment components, you have to watch for changes in the size of the orders. These changes can influence receiving schedules and patterns.

- **Lead Time Fluctuations by Order Size:** The variation in the time it takes to receive and process orders, depending on the size of the order. During periods of high receiving activity, disruptions can occur in the process. Different distribution centers (DCs) within the same company may respond differently to these challenges. Analyzing data related to order sizes and lead times can help identify patterns and inform strategies to optimize order processing.
- **Time-to-Shelf and Available-for-Sale:** Another key value to measure is the Time from Dock Receipt until Available-for-Sale in your ERP's on-hand value. This is another very beneficial gap value to monitor closely in each location. There are times when your lead time spikes are mainly the result of slowdowns inside the warehouse.

The Blue Ridge Approach

Blue Ridge captures disruptions to create a lead time forecast and measure its variation. The solution also takes disruptions into account in the safety stock calculations. We don't have a crystal ball for predicting long lead times, but we are methodical about how we calculate safety stock in terms of lead times. This results in massive gains, not to mention the power achieved when you can quantify what non-conformity by the supplier costs you. Our customers typically see a reduction in inventory and a fill rate improvement. Lead time forecasting intelligence deserves the same level of sophistication as demand forecasting.

Top inventory management teams also value collaboration, leveraging tools like [Integrated business planning](#) with their suppliers to achieve the most accurate lead times possible. They offer purchase projections to help suppliers be prepared and in stock.

Results of a Success

A 10% to 12% additional inventory reduction has been achieved by adding advanced lead time forecasting to supply chain planning. For companies whose service-level promise is higher than their supplier's performance, lead time forecasting is the key to delivering and meeting customer expectations.



3. Order Cycle Optimization

Order cycle optimization is the process of evaluating acquisition costs and carrying costs to determine the most profitable, or least costly order cycle to a supplier. The buying multiples component of your purchasing process has a great influence on the order cycle. Strong inventory analytics are required to see the true picture of your order cycle strategy and how it is influenced by your buying multiples to avoid carrying more cycle stock than necessary.

Buying Multiples Strategy

It is important to keep inventories low and supplier lines balanced. This requires implementing a strategy where the buying multiples in days are logically lower as you move from slow- to fast-movers. A smart buying multiples strategy may look like:

- The fast-moving items with the most inventory have buying multiples equal to low days of supply to ensure most of the inventory buys to a similar order-up-to level (OUTL) during replenishment.
- The medium- and slow-moving items have higher buying multiple days. However, they have lower inventory and sales dollars, so the impact is not dramatic.

This overall strategy is a cascading strategy resulting in maintaining a low inventory investment while replenishment remains balanced.

Best Practices

Choosing the smartest buying multiple is a combination of securing the lowest inventory investment combined with the most efficient buying and receiving costs. The iterative process includes:

1. **Understanding the definition:** Buying multiples are rounding multiples. Once you determine how much you need to buy, you make a final adjustment to the quantity to adhere to the required or chosen buying multiple.
2. **Gathering the data and choosing the best buying multiple:** The buying multiple decision is made for each item at each location. This starts with understanding all buying multiple sizes your suppliers offer for each item. Criteria to establish Buying Multiples should also include a financial analysis using the demand forecast, item cost, carrying cost, and acquisition cost.
3. **Using a supply chain analytics solution to coordinate options:** Advanced inventory planning tools provide intelligent logic and multi-level flexibility so you can set buying multiples that will automatically update based on demand which eliminates the common mistake of setting buying multiples too high.

4. **Creating an Inventory Scorecard for data-driven decision-making:** View the buying multiples aggregate values in dollars and forecasted weight including Supplier Order Cycle, Buying Multiple Days, and Effective Order Cycle. Assessing the suppliers' order cycle in combination with the buying multiples and economics of slow-moving, low-cost items will result in a higher effective order cycle.
5. **Using inventory analytics to paint a clear picture of your inventory investment:** Key metrics to help with order cycle optimization and smart buying multiples include Average Buying Multiple (days) and measuring the Number of Items with Buying Multiple (days) Greater than Order Cycle. These numbers can be useful in supplier negotiations and lead to more efficient buying resulting in inventory reduction and cost savings.

Establishing smart buying multiples is too often viewed as a project performed every few years, rather than an ongoing process.

The Blue Ridge Approach

Blue Ridge helps you find out what the optimal order frequency is, based on all variables, plus commercial and logistical constraints. A very complex, yet powerful calculation that ensures the buyer always makes the most profitable decisions when buying. Our best-in-class supply chain analytics solution points out where your 'required' buying multiples are stealing margins and forcing an item to be unprofitable. Blue Ridge also offers multi-level flexibility, automating the adjustment of buying multiples as needed during daily replenishment.

With the availability of advanced inventory analytics tools for buying multiples, order cycle optimization is a low-effort inventory reduction strategy with a high ROI.

Results of a Success

A 10% reduction in inventory is possible with order cycle optimization. Moving from an instinct-based buying multiple strategy to an intelligent financial strategy could be the key to freeing up significant capital for your business. Let smart and savvy be your path to extraordinary inventory reduction.



4. Safety Stock & Service Level Management

The next step is to determine the optimal service level for the market. One of the largest complexities in demand planning is Service Level Management and how to calculate safety stock so that a company can meet its service level goals without sabotaging margins.

Buffer stock, extra stock, overstock are names fondly given to Safety Stock. And to a certain extent, each name describes safety stock to an extent. Each name conveys the fact that extra on-hand inventory is involved. However, none of the terms adequately describe what the extra inventory is for, missing the true reason for why companies invest dollars in carrying extra inventory. The truth is: no forecasting algorithm is 100% accurate. Some amount of safety stock will always be needed to protect against the error that exists with demand forecasting.

The Blue Ridge Approach

Although safety stock and service level management are complex, Blue Ridge has condensed them in an easy and powerful tool that runs automatically.

Blue Ridge's demand forecasting technology optimizes the 5 components of safety stock referenced above. Our solution accounts for forecast errors through the demand planning process: the forecast is maintained regularly, applying seasonal profiles when appropriate, and making proper adjustments as needed. The technology also allows you to gain more control over your standard deviation by identifying seasonal tendencies and unfiltered promotional demand that may have previously gone unnoticed. Our Supply Chain Planning (SCP) algorithms have the power to calculate a safe amount of inventory to protect against the inherent forecast error all companies face.

The tool also allows you to apply proven Service Level Management strategies that will help bring greater accuracy to your demand forecasts, so you can hit the highest service level goals possible for your company's investment.

There are 5 key components to consider when calculating safety stock:

- 1. Demand Forecast** – forecast accuracy and velocity have a direct impact on safety stock.
- 2. Standard Deviation** – a measurement of forecast error and a main driver of safety stock. The greater the deviation, the greater the need for safety stock.
- 3. Lead Time and Lead Time Deviation** – the greater your lead time, the higher chance of lost sales. Lead time variability works the same as the standard deviation component.
- 4. Order Cycle** – reduces safety stock as the order cycle increases.
- 5. Service Goal** – arguably the main driver of safety stock. If you think you are carrying too much safety stock, you may need to re-evaluate your service levels.

Results of Success

By applying service level management strategies and using Blue Ridge's Demand Planning solutions, our customers have achieved:

- 11% Fill Rate Improvement
- 40% Reduction in Stockouts
- 10% Increase in In-Stock Availability
- 25% Decrease in Inventory Levels

Imagine being able to satisfy customers by consistently meeting service level goals, while also carrying less inventory – a seemingly aspirational outcome, made possible by Blue Ridge.



5. Automated Ordering

The role of demand planners and inventory analysts has changed from building orders to managing the key components, which are used to create replenishment order quantities for any type of item. Maintaining a proactive, accurate order quantity is the result of effective inventory component management.

Two Key Questions

How much to buy and when? The first 4 elements covered in this eBook are critical in the decision of how much to buy, and when to buy. The delicate calculation of order quantity and order timing takes into consideration all of the following elements:

- 4 Key Elements: Demand Forecast, Safety Stock, Lead Time Forecast, Order Cycle
- Low-Stock Point (Reorder Point) = Safety Stock + Lead Time
- Order-Up-To-Level = Safety Stock + Lead Time + Order Cycle
- Stock Status Balance = On Hand + On Order - Backorder/Reserve
- Service Goals to determine Allowable Amount of Lost Sales

Best Practices

A simple formula for success is as follows:

- Strong item component setup
- Disciplined daily replenishment
- Targeted, ongoing refinement of the components through intelligent analytics

This process allows teams to complete replenishment orders quickly. The review process consists of looking for surprises, ensuring consistent order patterns, and scanning opportunities for deals with suppliers.

Very little time is spent on the order details. However, if the analyst sees a questionable quantity, they don't ever the order quantity. They dig to find the issue in the components and fix any problems long-term.

Top-performing replenishment teams invest their best time and tools in proactive action, finding unique patterns in item categories/sectors and fixing long-term problems.

The Blue Ridge Approach

Blue Ridge's replenishment engine uses advanced science and proven techniques, including AI and machine learning, to proactively calculate the 4 components previously addressed in this eBook: demand forecasting, lead time forecasting, order cycle optimization, and service level management. Those elements combine to create the order quantities needed to maintain desired service levels and build precise replenishment orders daily. Our replenishment optimization solution makes it simple and efficient to aggregate data and build final order quantity that will deliver the best financial outcome. With strong, seasonally adjusted demand forecasting, the right safety stock amounts and the correct lead times, all orders will be in harmony with supply. The solution also offers a simulation for planning future orders.

The Blue Ridge solution ensures that you order when you should and in the most optimized manner. Our technology automatically delivers component precision, item awareness, and perfect orders that are ready to transmit, and reports anomalies to the buyer. This exception-based approach ensures the right focus and saves up to 75% to 95% of the time for planners.

Results of a Success



Time Savings: Tasks, like building orders, that previously occupied 6+ hours each day, can now be completed in a matter of minutes, freeing up time for more strategic initiatives delivering massive organizational value.



Service: Maintaining excellent inventory components ahead of time, and reviewing inventory positions, in an automated way across thousands of SKUs, enables on-time replenishment – with service goals maintained or even increased.



Lower Inventory: Using old manual replenishment methods, companies required extra inventory to account for the time-intensive review process. With replenishment optimization technology, emergency inventory is no longer required.



6. Special Orders

This section provides some strategies you can use to optimize Special Order opportunities in 3 key areas to drive incremental margin on all your promotions, investment buys, and overstock transfers/balancing. These areas offer a fast, easy win for boosting sales, expanding margins, elevating your products, and balancing overstock.

Events & Promotions

Best Practices

- **Protect your demand forecast:** Protect the integrity of the long-term demand forecast. Track demand during the promotional-event period and maintain the accuracy of your replenishment demand forecast, providing a history of promotional movement for future event analysis.
- **Keep your stock status clean:** Ensure that your inventory balance understands 'holding out' of the planned inventory. Planned promotional inventory that is not properly categorized will stop your necessary replenishment orders from occurring.
- **Get smarter over time:** Collect data with every new order, analyze, and refine it with every new order. Use the data to analyze historical promotional events success and failures.

Deals & Investment Buys

Best Practices

- **Have a corporate strategy:** The CFO, CEO and the inventory team need to be inspired by the potential; understand the math; and deliver the formulas and guidelines. The formulas should not change, but the guidelines will change as you enter different seasons of your cash position. You can then apply investment buying aggressiveness limits to evenly control the deal buys.

- **Act quickly:** When a deal is offered or accepted by your supplier, you should be minutes away from delivering the final order. Deliver the order quickly so you are the first to be offered future deals.
- **Layer your inventory and track your results:** Your inventory will go up and your profits will go up. Report your profit results frequently so that the company understands the reason for inventory increases.

Overstock Transfers and Balancing

Best Practices

- **Find the true overstock:** Overstock is unique to each item, and considers the item's demand forecast, seasonality, item order cycle optimization, buying multiples, economics and special inventory bought for promotions or events.
- **Understand the financial burden:** Overstock burden needs to be understood by applying the carrying cost that will be incurred before the item depletes down to a normal level.
- **Make it available:** Depending on your environment, your current transfer options and the cost of transferring product, your decision to transfer known overstock from a regional location should be a scientific and financial one. Use supply chain analytics to understand and report your overstock investment picture.

The Blue Ridge Approach

Managing Special Orders is a game of agility, and getting demand forecasting right is key. Blue Ridge's advanced forecasting solution provides the necessary platform to make smart decisions when it comes to special orders, and enables faster issue resolution if, or more likely when, the common mistakes above are encountered. The tool can also be used to review the impact of special orders immediately so you can create profiles and strategies of events that can be applied as a default starting point in the future. Blue Ridge empowers you to respond to deal opportunities, purchase promotional quantities, and analyze overstock balancing or secondary source opportunities based on reliable data, resulting in decision-making that drives profitability.

Results of a Success

Successful optimization of Special Orders requires a solid foundation, which has been set with the first 5 essential elements in this eBook. When completed successfully, optimizing Special Orders often increases revenue and cuts inventory up to 20%. Conduct promotions and events for increased exposure. Create and take advantage of every deal possible to increase profits, and keep inventories lean with smart overstock strategies. These are prime opportunities to improve the income statement of your company.



7. Validation

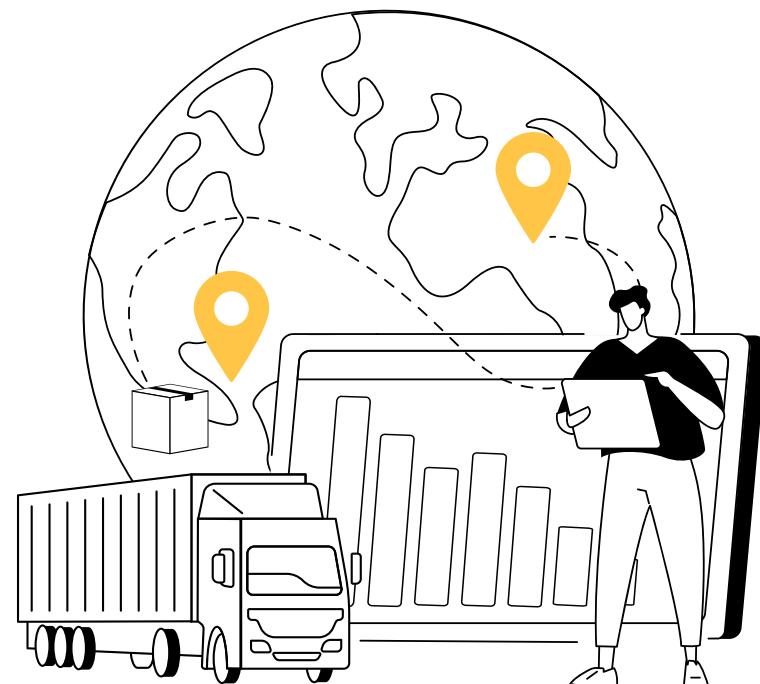
Before orders are considered ready to accept and transmit to the supplier, making certain the orders are valid is a critical final step. Order Validity Analysis that allows you to place orders that are logical for the receiving team, keeps your lines in balance, and ensures future order cycles are synchronized.

Best Practices

- **Adhere to the Chosen Bracket:** Best-in-class demand planning carries the process through to completion for inventory teams. There should not be a need for manual adjustments for buying multiples or building brackets. This final step is simply executing the decisions previously established throughout the process based on intelligent parameters. During step 3 (Order Cycle Optimization), you selected the most profitable Order Cycle, as well as the most profitable Order Minimum or Bracket. During step 6 (Special Orders), you adjusted items for any deals, planned promotions and overstock balancing decisions.
- **Build Days in Balance to the Chosen Bracket:** Building days in balance is key. Avoid simply adding quantity to your top item or two to achieve the total. This puts the line out of balance and all other items will be harmed. Remember, one of the most important goals you have in this process is to build the order in such a way that you are well prepared for the next order. You are preparing for the next order as much as you are trying to complete this order. Both goals are equally important.

- **Round Item Quantities to Buying Multiples & Convenience**

Multiples: Many items have several choices of buying multiples (i.e. eaches, cases, layers, pallets, etc.). Each item must adhere to its chosen rounding multiple rules AND achieve the supplier minimum or bracket. This may result in adjusting each order quantity to round to the buying multiple. Some suppliers also enforce requirements on certain items, including unique item minimums. These requirements can lead to critical decisions of centrally stocking the item, or even not stocking the item.



The Blue Ridge Approach

The Blue Ridge solution expedites the sophisticated and scientific process of order validation. The system automatically ensures orders are valid based on previously established, intelligent parameters and eliminates the need for manual adjustments or intervention. Automation includes rounding each order quantity to their chosen buying multiple or intelligent convenience multiple. Additionally, if the overall orders need to meet a supplier's minimum or chosen bracket level, the proper amount of additional time supply will be added evenly across the line of products.

With Blue Ridge, the validation of orders is as simple as clicking the "accept" button or even allowing the solution to auto-accept the orders for you. The process of completing orders becomes more efficient from a time savings perspective, but also more effective with improved planning precision that will maximize your inventory performance.

Results of a Success

Executing the 7 essential elements with precision will result in supply chain excellence in the form of faster and more accurate buying decisions, reduced lost sales and overstock, and increased fill rates and profitability. By implementing this process, you will undoubtedly have a positive impact on your organization. After all, it is the basis for Blue Ridge's solution, and our customers have achieved real results like:

41% Forecasting **Accuracy** Improvement

25% Inventory **Reduction**

10% **Increase** in In-Stock Availability

40% **Reduction** in Stockouts

41% **Increase** in Inventory Turns

41% Service Level / Fill Rate **Improvement**

41% **Savings** on Transfer Cost

41% **Decrease** in Average On Hand

Conclusion

The 7 Essential Elements in this eBook will help you avoid numerous demand planning challenges and deliver rapid results in service, inventory, and profit.

Blue Ridge offers an intuitive and user-friendly solution that empowers planners to effortlessly handle intricate supply chain configurations and navigate complex demand patterns. Our cutting-edge technology streamlines operations by automating the 7 essential elements to set you up for excellence.

The opportunity to improve exists and the benefits are undeniable...what are you waiting for?

An investment in Blue Ridge empowers you with predictive insights and precise buying recommendations based on comprehensive details. You'll always be prepared and in control, ready to make fast and accurate planning decisions. Our software improves cashflow and increases profitability by optimizing spending, increasing service levels, and reducing overstock and lost sales.

Our unmatched LifeLine supply chain software coaching enables you to accelerate software adoption and efficiencies while simplifying buying complexity. We'll stand by you so that you can

BE SUPPLY CHAIN INVINCIBLE

To learn more about how you can optimize your supply chain planning with Blue Ridge, schedule a meeting with one of our supply chain experts. Connect with us at: <https://blueridgeglobal.com/contact/>

About Blue Ridge



Blue Ridge is the supply chain software that improves planning precision with an unmatched partnership so you can eliminate guesswork and maximize inventory performance. We empower you with predictive insights and precise buying recommendations based on comprehensive details. You'll always be prepared and in control, ready to make fast and accurate planning decisions. Our software improves cashflow and increases profitability by optimizing spending, increasing service levels, and reducing overstock and lost sales. Our unmatched LifeLine supply chain software coaching enables you to accelerate software adoption and efficiencies while simplifying buying complexity. We'll stand by you so that you can be supply chain invincible. For more information, visit www.blueridgeglobal.com or request a demo at blueridgeglobal.com/request-demo.