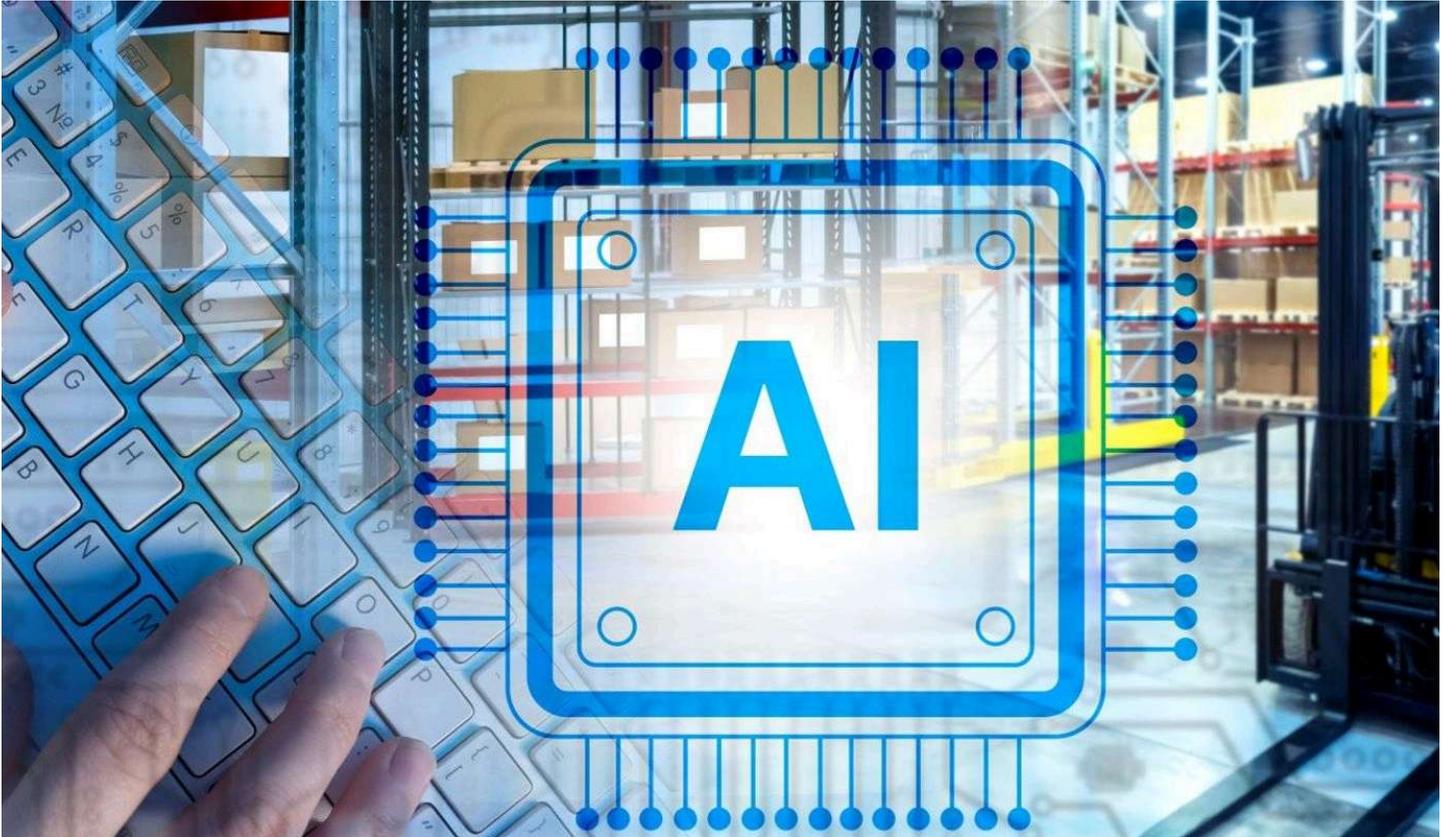**S&P** Journal of Commerce

Rapid pace of AI development suggests shippers should be patient

Logistics companies have a clearer mandate to invest in AI as a way to reduce the cost of serving shippers. Photo credit: FOTOGRIN / Shutterstock.com.

[Eric Johnson, Senior Technology Editor](#) | Feb 12, 2026, 4:53 PM EST

While the world braces itself for the true impacts of artificial intelligence (AI), shippers and logistics services providers (LSPs) face a decision on whether to jump in with both feet or wait watchfully from the sidelines.

Key to that decision, though, is the reality that it takes less time than ever to build software, which shrinks the disadvantage that a company has playing catching up.

"Time is compressing," a software vendor to the freight brokerage industry told the *Journal of Commerce* at the Manifest supply chain technology conference in Las Vegas this week. "The development cycles are shortening."

Journal of Commerce Column

A shipper at the conference wondered whether it needed to be on the bleeding edge of adopting AI in its organization, or whether it could hang back.

Practically speaking, the speed of development in the technology world means that shippers, in particular, won't necessarily face a penalty for feeling overwhelmed when it comes to how and where to adopt AI. They can also, in the meantime, shift some of that AI burden onto their service providers.

That's because LSPs face a different mandate than shippers. The main priorities of LSPs are to work with capacity providers and serve shippers. Any technology investment must touch one of those areas. So there is a clearer imperative for intermediaries to invest in AI because there are fewer priorities to juggle.

Shippers, meanwhile, juggle an array of needs inside and outside of logistics and transportation. Other needs in the company may trump the need to build or buy AI capability tied to freight transportation or global trade.

Additionally, the pace of change within AI technology circles disincentivizes the ultimate user of the technology from diving headlong into commitments that might be obsolete in months. Take for instance recent developments around coding developments from OpenAI and Anthropic that seem to be rapidly advancing how quickly products can be built.

What advantage would a shipper have to be on the bleeding edge right now, when the location of that bleeding edge changes almost weekly?

Playing catch-up faster

The pace of being able to catch up also matters. With software and product development speeding up, the time it takes to adopt and incorporate products will shrink as well. So if a two-year head start in using a traditional software-as-a-service tool historically represented a major edge over a peer, a shipper that waited now can theoretically leapfrog in a way it couldn't in previous software adoption cycles.

This shouldn't serve as an excuse for shippers, and especially LSPs, to wait things out. Rather, they should be researching and testing in a minimally disruptive way so they understand how things such as AI agents are affecting transportation and trade processes that matter to their businesses. Being informationally proactive but financially conservative is probably the best course to take in a technology environment this fast-moving.

It would be hard to understate just how much AI dominated conversations at Manifest. The industry is wrestling with how AI will change the shape of current headcounts and

future workforces, how it will be priced, and whether it will do the work of existing software.

None of these issues are clear, especially as the large AI developers put the ability to build applications in the hands of non-technical people. That could change how and when software is bought, maintained, updated, and customized.

It's certainly an exciting and daunting future, but one where shippers may want to hang back, with eyes open, and let their LSPs suffer the heavy bruising.

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