



Supplier vs. Strategic Partner: Know the Difference

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How often have you communicated with your suppliers this year? If your company is like most, you've probably exchanged more emails and had more phone calls (or Zoom calls) than ever. There are supply chain issues in every industry, and you can't afford to let shortages take you by surprise. The causes, it seems, are everywhere. Whether it's because of COVID shutdowns and energy issues in China, the war in Ukraine, or labor shortages and inflation here at home, you can't make product if you don't have supply.

Have you spoken with some vendors for the first time in years? If so, it might be because they provide some small amount of input that's critical to keeping your production line running. Maybe you never realized how important that supplier was until they couldn't meet demand anymore. For gasket fabricators, shortages of silicones and other materials have been front-and-center. If you've experienced them, you've probably gotten more help from suppliers with whom you have strong relationships.

When what you need is on allocation, and you're begging and pleading for more material to keep your production line moving, who's more likely to help? Would you rather contact a vendor where your relationship is transactional, or would you rather work with a supplier who's your strategic partner? Both types of vendors are available to you. Often, transactional suppliers lead with price because price is the only advantage that have – for as long as it lasts.

Specialty Silicone Products (SSP) wants to be your strategic partner. In other words, we're not looking to be a transactional supplier to gasket fabricators, or to the original equipment manufacturers (OEMs) that we serve. If you're looking for a strategic partner, we're ready to work with you and can tell you about how our partners have enjoyed double-digit percentage growth year after year. SSP and its partners know each other's teams and have deep understanding of each other's operations.

Some of the successes our partners have enjoyed come from talking about trends with us and identifying issues of concern before they can become headaches. At SSP, one of the ways we do this is by doing what we say we're going to do. This builds mutual trust, but so do regular and detailed communications that provide our partners with the information that both they and their customers need. When our customers are strategic partners to their customers, the entire supply chain is stronger.

No one likes to be the bearer of bad news, of course, but sometimes a strategic partner needs to explain that a ship date was missed or there were quality control (QC) issues. When there are supply chain disruptions and shortages of key ingredients, price increases are unavoidable. At SSP, we know that our partners want, need, and deserve the details behind our decisions. They can then share this information with their own customers and, as strategic partners to these other companies, also add value.

Now that the travel restrictions of COVID are over, SSP is visiting customer sites and welcoming guests to our Ballston Spa, New York (USA) facility. When we visit you, however, please don't look for donuts or pizza. Why settle for saturated fats when you can get information and insights that will make your company leaner and stronger? We're ready to share what we know and, through mutual strategy sessions, will work with you so that you can increase sales and profits as you use our materials.

Finally, when you work with SSP, you'll discover that we're willing to develop new products or modify existing ones even if the business doesn't represent a substantial amount of revenue for us. That's because we know it's important to you, and our goal is to support our partners and their customers. By looking at the big picture, we think we can see more clearly. Plus, it's been our experience that helping our strategic partners eventually provides everyone with a win/win solution.