

Interview

Supply Chain Management

An Interview with André Thornton,
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, ASW Global



André Thornton

EDITORS' NOTE A former Major League Baseball player, André Thornton previously served as the President and CEO of GPI Procurement Services and was one of the founding principals of Apple Partners, a restaurant management group. He is also the Chair of the Ohio Chapter of the International Warehouse Logistics Association.

COMPANY BRIEF Headquartered in Akron, Ohio, supply chain management company ASW Global (www.aswservices.com) serves such clients as Wal-Mart, Diebold, and the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company. The company operates in Foreign Trade Zone #181, which provides tax and duty benefits for its clients. With strategic locations in Ohio and Michigan, ASW Global has one-day access to more than 50 percent of the population throughout America and Canada and boasts more than one million square feet of storage space. Employing more than 240 people, ASW Global is one of the largest minority-owned and certified third-party logistics companies in the United States.

What is your outlook for the growth of ASW Global business in the coming year?

We are excited about the opportunities in the marketplace for supply chain and logistics, and we're excited about our future and our potential growth opportunities. ASW Global is a supply chain management company, offering services relating to warehousing and distribution, contract logistics, contract manufacturing,

and transportation management. We're one of the largest minority-owned companies in the country in this industry. We have the wonderful pleasure of serving some great clients, such as Wal-Mart, and running operations in a couple of states for them.

Will ASW grow both organically and through acquisitions?

When it comes to growth, one strategy is never enough. We have a three-pronged growth initiative, and we certainly plan to grow organically, deepening our relationships with our current clients. But we also have to be nimble enough and flexible enough to be able to align ourselves strategically in the market as needed, and sometimes you have to acquire to get there.

What value does your Ohio headquarters offer your company?

At one point, Ohio was certainly strong in the manufacturing and distribution arena. We still have some nice presence in those markets today. But the world has changed, especially around logistics and supply chain. It's a more flexible industry, and you have to move where the clients and the business are. Ohio still gives us a tremendous marketplace, in terms of infrastructure and opportunities; there is a tremendous group of companies in our region, and from Ohio we can access more than 50 percent of the U.S. population. Ohio is a wonderful location from which to do business, but today, no matter where you are headquartered, you have to be able to do business nationally and globally, and we have that capability.

In developing new client relationships, do you work mainly with the C suite?

We try to build customer relationships throughout the organization. In the supply chain industry, we touch so many areas of an organization, and understanding our clients' strategic goals in each of those areas allows us to design better solutions and services for our clients. Our clients are important to our success, and we hope, we are important to their success. Any good relationship is a two-way street. We certainly desire to have access to key people within our client organizations, and we want them to know they have access to our key people, and that definitely includes me.

Are you satisfied with ASW's ability to attract talented employees?

Finding talent is a challenge for any company, especially in today's marketplace. But this industry is not going away and can provide an

exciting future for young people. Goods and services will always move, and the systems to move them will become more and more sophisticated in the future.

Do you believe community involvement to be a corporation's responsibility? Has giving back, if you will, become part of the ASW culture?

It's vitally important that a company is an asset to its community – from the standpoint not only of providing jobs but also of helping its community thrive. To be a good corporate citizen, we have to be engaged in the community's needs and strive for the success of our community. It's no good building a great house on a crumbling foundation. You need to be part of a fertile and growing community. That will allow you to attract the kinds of employees you need and offer services that complement those people. So you have to think outside your company. You have to think in terms of your entire community and the people you serve.

Have you always had an entrepreneurial spirit, even when you were playing professional baseball?

I always felt that although baseball was certainly a wonderful opportunity, it wasn't something I'd be able to do my entire life. It was very enjoyable, but I also enjoy building things and working with people. There's no better place to do that than in a business environment.

Are you able to achieve a work-life balance?

Of course. It's very important to do the best job I can within a certain time frame but then be able to step away from it. It doesn't do me any good to work 20 hours a day and end up sick or otherwise not functional. I'm no superman; this company doesn't function just because of André Thornton. We have a great team, and that team has a responsibility. I have to trust that team to do its job well. We try to work together to keep the whole team healthy, because work-life balance is important for bottom-line P&L performance. Better balance means higher productivity, better employee retention, and healthier employees.

Being located in Ohio contributes to this balance by allowing my team to experience business success within the context of a fulfilling life. Commutes aren't long, there is a lot to do no matter what your interests are, and there is a solid midwestern values system that emphasizes the importance of balance. Ohio is called "the state of perfect balance," and I believe that's true. ●