





For nearly a year, supply chain disruptions have caused delays, and sometimes it has become impossible to secure critical materials and components needed to build sports equipment. Price increases and quantity limitations for steel, aluminum, glass, foam, fasteners, finishes, and packaging materials have been common occurrences for months, with no relief in sight.

Adding to the upward pressure on prices, labor is also in very short supply in most of the United States, and hiring additional employees to meet demand can be a challenge. Current employees are often working overtime and taking on new responsibilities in different departments. Additionally, domestic and ocean-based freight costs have skyrocketed, in some cases to 100% higher than 2018-19 rates.

Most businesses are doing everything possible to maintain their quality, service, and delivery standards during this challenging time. Private college and university campuses will be successful in navigating the next year or more by taking advantage of some the following strategies forged in the fire of a worldwide unbalancing of supply and demand at a level and duration unseen in our lifetimes.

Shop Around and Order Early

Prices for most products and services have been escalating rapidly. The experts are not expecting them to drop for many months, if not longer. With manufacturers and distributors taking mid-year price increases and adding input surcharges due to their suppliers' price increases, finding the best price will require some shopping around. Even finding the needed equipment in stock will be challenging at any cost.

Create Flexibility in Recreation Areas

Single-sport and sports-only facilities are so "last season," as they say in the fashion industry. With staff shortages limiting hours and maintenance support, facilities need to serve as many users as possible. With electronically-controlled divider curtains, one gym can provide basketball, volleyball, baseball/softball, and even futsal and team handball at the same time, reducing scheduling conflicts and the number of hours needed to staff the space. Add rolling portable equipment or key- or touchscreen-controlled

ceiling- and wall-mounted basketball and volleyball systems for additional flexibility. Small portable bleachers can easily and safely be repositioned between sports and be removed or stored for a non-sports fundraising, academic, or other community events.

Choose Height Adjustable and Multi-Sport Systems

Height adjusters that move the basketball rim height from the official ten feet to as low as seven and a half feet have long been common on basketball systems in middle and elementary school gyms, as well as multiple-purpose and club facilities that provide opportunities to players of all ages and abilities. Similarly, some volleyball systems can be adjusted to men's, women's and junior plus badminton, pickleball, and tennis heights.

Invest in NFHS and NCAA Approved Equipment

Whether campuses host international FIBA-sanctioned play, NCAA competitions, NFHS high school games, or just club and

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intramural leagues, the equipment needs to be suitable for the highest level of play. It is no surprise that more sports-related injuries occur at pickup games on the local community courts or after the coach goes home on the municipal soccer field than on a competition-level courts or fields.

Replace Older Systems with Newer, More Convenient Models

People would generally not choose to back to the early cell phones—heavy bags with antennas and limited service. Likewise, athletes are wise to demand the latest technology, too. For example, volleyball systems used to be heavy steel structures, then evolved to lightweight but flexible aluminum posts; now there are lightweight carbon fiber volleyball poles that are as rigid as steel, as well as freestanding portables and push-button, ceiling-suspended systems.

Invest in Sports Equipment with Long-lasting Warranties

Even in a world where refrigerators are considered disposable after five years, customers can still find high-quality sports equipment from customer-friendly companies that back their products with long-term or lifetime warranties. Making equipment to last a lifetime might seem like an old-fashioned concept but, for the modern world, this is the best way to reduce energy needed to produce both raw materials and finished goods, thereby and reducing the impact on our landfills.

From a facilities perspective, additional reasons for shopping around for longer warranties can include using the maintenance budget for other projects, reducing staff hours spent installing replacement equipment, and improving customer satisfaction by having limited downtime for broken or dangerous equipment.

Order Early

Campus personnel have been busy putting out fires and managing constantly changing guidelines for over eighteen months now, but worn out equipment must still be replaced. Equipment that would normally be in stock for next-day shipment may not be available this year. Even if the needed equipment is in stock, shipping delays and increased costs may mean that events or games must be cancelled. The best insurance is to place orders ten to twelve

weeks before the items are needed; longer lead times may be needed for custom items such as special sizes or colors, or items that require artwork approval, such as graphic wall padding or lettered volleyball post padding.

Source Domestic Manufacturers' Products

While supply chain issues are widespread regardless of where products are manufactured, offshore sourced components and equipment are impacted more than American-made options due to major ocean, rail, and trucking industry bottlenecks. The higher the offshore content of suppliers' products, the more unpredictable the lead time. Some non-U.S. sourced materials and products that used to have 60-day lead times are now running 180 days when considering long in transit times.

In addition, the unpredictable nature of current demand makes forecasting especially challenging for sports equipment suppliers who rely on non-U.S. sourced materials.

Partner Locally

Local and regional sports equipment dealers and installers are often in the best position

to help campuses determine needs, guide decision-making, and to ultimately provide high-quality equipment and service. Use of local resources is also good for the community, keeping funds in the area and building support for the campus and facilities.

Take Care of Staff

Every college staff employee has been impacted by operating a facility under conditions that were unimaginable just a few months ago. The pressures of managing their personal lives, maintaining their work responsibilities, and wanting to help people struggling with their individual challenges can be too much to take on alone. For some organizations, one-on-one meetings or notes to say thanks and check in are enough. Some may find it more effective to organize a group meal, event, or special recognition program. For campuses that have identified staff satisfaction as a concern, now is the time to look at organizational improvements that can help retain current staff, along with their knowledge and passion for the facility and its success.

Call to Action

If there is one lasting contribution that a worldwide health crisis can make, it might be widespread acceptance of the need for flexibility under rapidly changing conditions. A year ago, many wished for a return to normal or "new normal," but the sports world has always had a way of pushing forward toward new world records, higher participation rates, and—as the Olympic Games always remind us—finding common ground through competition.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Nick Cusick is the founder and Chief Executive Officer at Bison, Inc., a U.S. manufacturer of sporting goods equipment. Athletic directors, coaches, facility administrators, and equipment managers rely on Bison to provide safe, durable, innovative and on-time products. In 2013, IPI by Bison began manufacturing custom-built sports equipment required for the new gymnasium construction and renovation market.

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