

2026

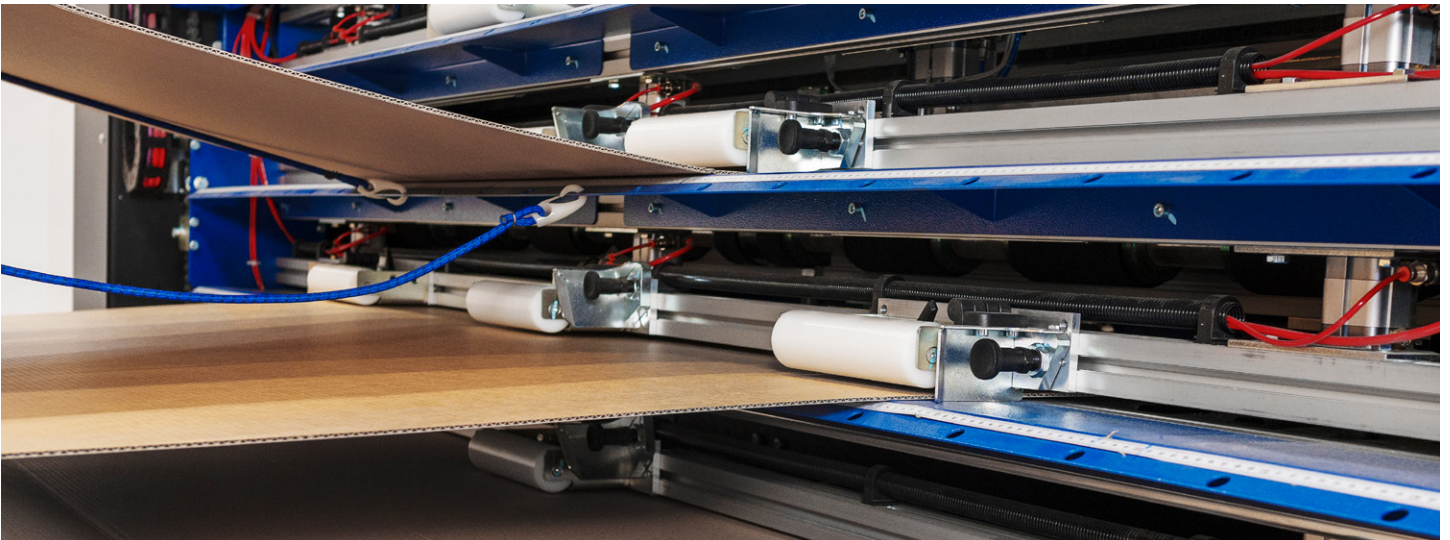
# Packaging line upgrade guide

A practical framework with  
expert insights



## PACKAGING AUTOMATION:

# Evaluate your lines to meet performance needs in 2026 and beyond



## Packaging automation for complex supply chains

In 2026, manufacturers face rising pressures around throughput, SKU complexity, quality expectations, labor availability and sustainability readiness. Deciding when—and how—to upgrade your packaging line doesn't have to be overwhelming.

Here, industry expert Craig Buscema, Director of Business Development for Smurfit Westrock's Automated Packaging Systems, identifies five key performance factors to consider when evaluating your packaging operation along with decision parameters for an effective, efficient upgrade. Together, they form a clear roadmap for smarter, future-ready packaging investments.

## PACKAGING AUTOMATION:

# Five key performance factors

Not all packaging challenges require a full system overhaul. By examining your line across five key performance factors, you can quickly determine whether an upgrade is necessary and where it will create the most value.

Expert insights provided by industry veteran Craig Buscema, Director of Business Development for Smurfit Westrock's Automated Packaging Systems



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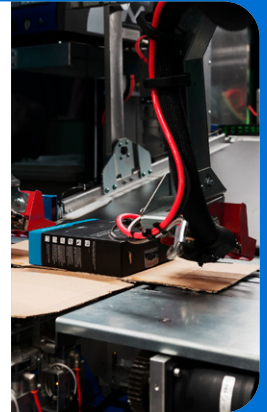
## Speed

*When throughput limits hold you back*

If your line can't keep pace with demand, struggles with bottlenecks or loses efficiency during changeovers, it may be time for an upgrade. Modern systems improve net line speed—not just machine speed—by reducing manual touchpoints and optimizing flow.

### EXPERT INSIGHT

“ Speed isn't just about running faster—it's about running smarter. When a line is designed to eliminate bottlenecks, your throughput rises without pushing equipment or people beyond their limits. ”



### EXPERT INSIGHT

“ Flexibility has become a performance requirement. Even where change-overs aren't a common occurrence, a line's ability to adapt to new sizes or formats means operational resilience in a competitive and ever-changing market. ”

2

## Flexibility

*Staying ready for more SKUs and new formats*

Today's lines must be built with the agility to handle SKU changes, evolving sustainability requirements and multiple packaging formats. Flexible automation helps you adapt quickly while maintaining efficiency.

3

## Reliability

### *Reducing downtime and maintenance burden*

Aging equipment with inconsistent performance or hard-to-source parts can quietly drain productivity. Upgraded systems with predictive monitoring and smarter controls improve uptime and stabilize output across shifts.

#### EXPERT INSIGHT

“ When reliability becomes unpredictable, everything downstream is at risk. Dependable equipment gives you consistent performance you can build your schedule around. ”



#### EXPERT INSIGHT

“ Quality issues often reveal deeper process challenges. Improving accuracy and consistency through automation protects both your product and your reputation. ”



4

## Quality

### *Elevating accuracy, traceability and packaging performance*

Packaging is expected to deliver consistent, dependable performance across increasingly complex supply chains. By integrating automated packaging systems with materials specifically engineered for performance, businesses can create packaging that not only reduces waste but also reinforces brand trust and maintains integrity from production to end delivery.

5

## Labor

### *Improving safety, staffing, and workforce efficiency*

Packaging lines that still require physically demanding or repetitive tasks are difficult to staff and are prime candidates for change. Upgraded modern lines help reduce ergonomic risks, improve safety, and allow teams to shift toward higher-value work.

#### EXPERT INSIGHT

“ Labor isn't just a cost—it's an opportunity. When automation takes on the repetitive work, your people can focus on what drives the most value. ”



## Evaluating your options for smarter decisions

Once you understand *why* an upgrade may be needed, evaluate how to move forward using these parameters:

**Budget:** Clarify your investment range and expected ROI over a set timeframe (for example, the next 3–5 years).

**Space constraints:** Account for footprint limitations and look for modular or compact solutions where needed.

**Speed & formats:** Talk to your marketing and commercial teams about sales channels that have specific requirements. Define target run rates and identify any future packaging formats or sustainability shifts.

**Labor requirements:** Consider how staffing will evolve post-upgrade, including operator training.

**Work with a trusted packaging automation supplier:** Choose a partner who provides engineering and design expertise, performance-matched materials, testing support and long-term service—not just equipment.

### EXPERT INSIGHT

“ The right supplier doesn't just deliver machinery—they help you make the right decisions. Look for a partner who can guide engineering, materials and package development, and integration as well as provide long-term support. ”



#### CONTACT

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[Learn more about our solutions](#)

The go-to sustainable packaging partner of choice, Smurfit Westrock offers an unrivalled product portfolio and brings expertise, scale and a global presence of 500+ packaging and other facilities as well as 59 mills across 40 countries.

With the circular economy at the core of our business, we use renewable, recyclable and recycled materials to create sustainable packaging solutions. These solutions are supported by cutting-edge packaging automation to help our customers streamline and optimize operations.

As a trusted partner to companies across the world, Smurfit Westrock is dedicated to creating efficient and scalable paper and packaging solutions to help solve complex packaging challenges.