



A GUIDE TO FASTER FULFILLMENT: HOW TO CUT DELAYS, SPEED UP ORDERS & KEEP CUSTOMERS HAPPY



Fast fulfillment isn't just about how quickly your 3PL ships orders—it's about how well your systems, data, and processes work together to eliminate delays, reduce costs, and improve efficiency.

If your order flow, inventory accuracy, and warehouse strategy aren't optimized, fulfillment slows down, costs increase, and customer satisfaction drops.

Use this guide to remove inefficiencies, improve fulfillment speed, and ensure your 3PL is operating at peak performance.



STEP 1

ORDERS AREN'T REACHING YOUR 3PL INSTANTLY

Fulfillment starts the moment an order is placed. If your system isn't instantly syncing with your 3PL, orders sit in limbo before processing even begins.

Common Pitfalls

Even when companies have a reliable 3PL, internal system inefficiencies can create unnecessary order processing delays. Here are some of the most common issues that slow fulfillment down:

- **Order Syncing Delays:** Orders take minutes (or even hours) to appear in your 3PL's system.
- **Incomplete or Incorrect Order Data:** SKU mismatches, missing shipping details, or manual fixes delay processing.
- **Lack of Prioritization:** Expedited and high-priority orders may not get processed first.

STEP 1: CONTINUED

Assess & Fix These Issues

To speed up fulfillment, orders must move instantly from your system to your 3PL, be prioritized automatically, and provide real-time visibility into order progress. Ensuring seamless data flow between systems eliminates unnecessary processing delays.

Here are ways to evaluate and fix these issues:

- **Audit Your System-to-3PL Order Flow:** Ensure orders sync instantly from your eCommerce, ERP, or OMS to your 3PL. Identify any latency issues—orders should appear in real time.
- **Automate Order Prioritization:** Set up rules for rush orders, pre-orders, and multi-item shipments to be flagged for faster processing.
- **Improve Visibility Into Order Status:** Use a real-time order tracking dashboard and set up automated alerts for delays or flagged orders.

Key Takeaway: The speed of fulfillment starts with instant order syncing and prioritization. If your system lags or fails to prioritize urgent orders, processing will always be slower than necessary.



STEP 2

INVENTORY DATA ISN'T ALWAYS ACCURATE

If your inventory system doesn't match your 3PL's stock levels in real time, you risk overselling, backorders, and fulfillment slowdowns.

Common Pitfalls

Inventory misalignment happens when stock levels aren't properly tracked across all fulfillment locations. Here's what typically causes these issues:

- **Stock Levels Aren't Updated in Real Time:** You may sell items that aren't actually available.
- **Poor Inventory Distribution:** If stock isn't positioned strategically, shipping times increase.
- **Lack of Automated Inventory Alerts:** If you react to stockouts instead of preventing them, fulfillment slows.

STEP 2: CONTINUED

Assess & Fix These Issues

Accurate inventory data keeps fulfillment running smoothly. Syncing stock levels across all systems ensures orders are only placed for available products, while proper inventory distribution reduces shipping times and costs.

Here are ways to evaluate and fix these issues:

- **Sync Inventory Data Automatically:** Ensure your ERP, OMS, and WMS update in real time with your 3PL. Audit inventory levels weekly for mismatches.
- **Distribute Inventory for Faster Fulfillment:** Position SKUs based on demand patterns so orders ship from the closest location.
- **Use Predictive Analytics:** Implement demand forecasting tools and set up low-inventory alerts before stock reaches critical thresholds.

Key Takeaway: Real-time inventory tracking eliminates costly stockouts and shipping delays. Ensuring your stock data is always accurate allows for faster, more reliable fulfillment.



STEP 3

WAREHOUSE SLOTTING SLOWS DOWN PICKING & PACKING

If your best-selling products aren't easily accessible, or if pickers travel too far between SKUs, fulfillment will always be slower than necessary.

Common Pitfalls

Inefficient warehouse slotting leads to longer processing times, increased labor costs, and shipping delays. These are the most common slotting issues that slow fulfillment:

- **High-Demand SKUs Aren't Near Packing Stations:** Workers must travel further, adding unnecessary time.
- **Inefficient Picking Paths:** Pickers cross the warehouse repeatedly, increasing fulfillment time.
- **Bulk Storage Slows High-Turnover Items:** If best-sellers are in deep storage, retrieval takes longer.

STEP 3: CONTINUED

Assess & Fix These Issues

Optimizing warehouse slotting ensures orders move through fulfillment as quickly as possible. Products should be positioned based on demand, order frequency, and picking efficiency to reduce unnecessary travel time in the warehouse.

Here are ways to evaluate and fix these issues:

- **Audit SKU Placement & Picking Time:** Request pick time reports from your 3PL to find slow-moving areas in the warehouse.
- **Use ABC Slotting:** Store A-items (top 20% of sales) in the most accessible locations, with B- and C-items positioned accordingly.
- **Optimize Picking Routes:** Ensure frequently ordered SKUs are stored near each other, and work with your 3PL to use batch or zone picking to reduce travel time.

Key Takeaway: The right product placement inside the warehouse directly impacts fulfillment speed. Poor slotting leads to wasted time, while optimized storage increases efficiency.

A woman in a yellow safety vest is holding a white box in a warehouse setting. She is looking down at the box. In the background, there are shelves with boxes and another person working.

STEP 4

RETURNS PROCESSING IS TOO SLOW

Slow returns processing creates inventory bottlenecks, increases storage costs, and delays restocking, making it harder to fulfill future orders.

Common Pitfalls

Returned inventory often sits in warehouses longer than necessary due to inefficient processing workflows. Here's what typically causes delays:

- **Returns Aren't Processed Quickly:** If items aren't inspected and restocked promptly, inventory flow slows.
- **No Clear Criteria for Restocking vs. Disposal:** Without a structured process, warehouses fill with unprocessed stock.
- **Lack of Real-Time Visibility Into Returns:** If teams can't track return progress, customer inquiries take longer.

STEP 4: CONTINUED

Assess & Fix These Issues

A structured returns process ensures returned items are inspected, categorized, and restocked quickly so they don't disrupt fulfillment operations. Faster processing improves inventory accuracy, cash flow, and customer satisfaction.

Here are ways to evaluate and fix these issues:

- **Establish a Dedicated Returns Workflow:** Ensure returns are scanned and categorized immediately upon receipt.
- **Improve Returns Processing Speed:** Set SLAs with your 3PL for return processing—most should be completed within 48 hours.
- **Automate Customer Return Notifications:** Send customers instant return tracking updates once items are received and processed.

Key Takeaway: A fast, structured returns process keeps inventory flowing and prevents unnecessary fulfillment slowdowns.

EVERY SECOND COUNTS IN FULFILLMENT.

Customers expect fast, seamless delivery—if your orders are stuck in processing, your inventory is out of sync, or your 3PL is operating inefficiently, you're already falling behind.

The best fulfillment operations don't rely on guesswork. They identify weak points, track performance relentlessly, and fine-tune every step of the process. Orders flow instantly. Inventory stays accurate. Warehouses move like clockwork. Returns don't pile up.

And when that happens? You ship faster. You cut costs. You keep customers coming back.

This checklist gives you the exact playbook to evaluate where fulfillment bottlenecks exist and how to fix them. The companies that implement these changes aren't just keeping up—they're pulling ahead.



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For immediate assistance, contact us directly at [\(866\) 232-6533](tel:866-232-6533), or email at sales@idsfulfillment.com.