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THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO AVOIDING HOLIDAY LOGISTICS PITFALLS

The holiday season is the most profitable time of the year for many brands—but also the most unforgiving.

Orders pile up faster than any other time of the year, marketing pushes are already in motion, and customers expect every package to arrive when promised. If your logistics fail, the effects show up fast in missed ship dates, lost sales, and a wave of customer service issues.

We talk to brands every year who share the problems they ran into during peak with their current provider. These issues are often avoidable when you know what to look for and what to confirm with your fulfillment partner ahead of time.

In this guide, we break down the four most common pitfalls and how to avoid them so your business can get through the holidays without losing momentum.



PITFALL 1:

INVENTORY INACCURACIES

THE PROBLEM:

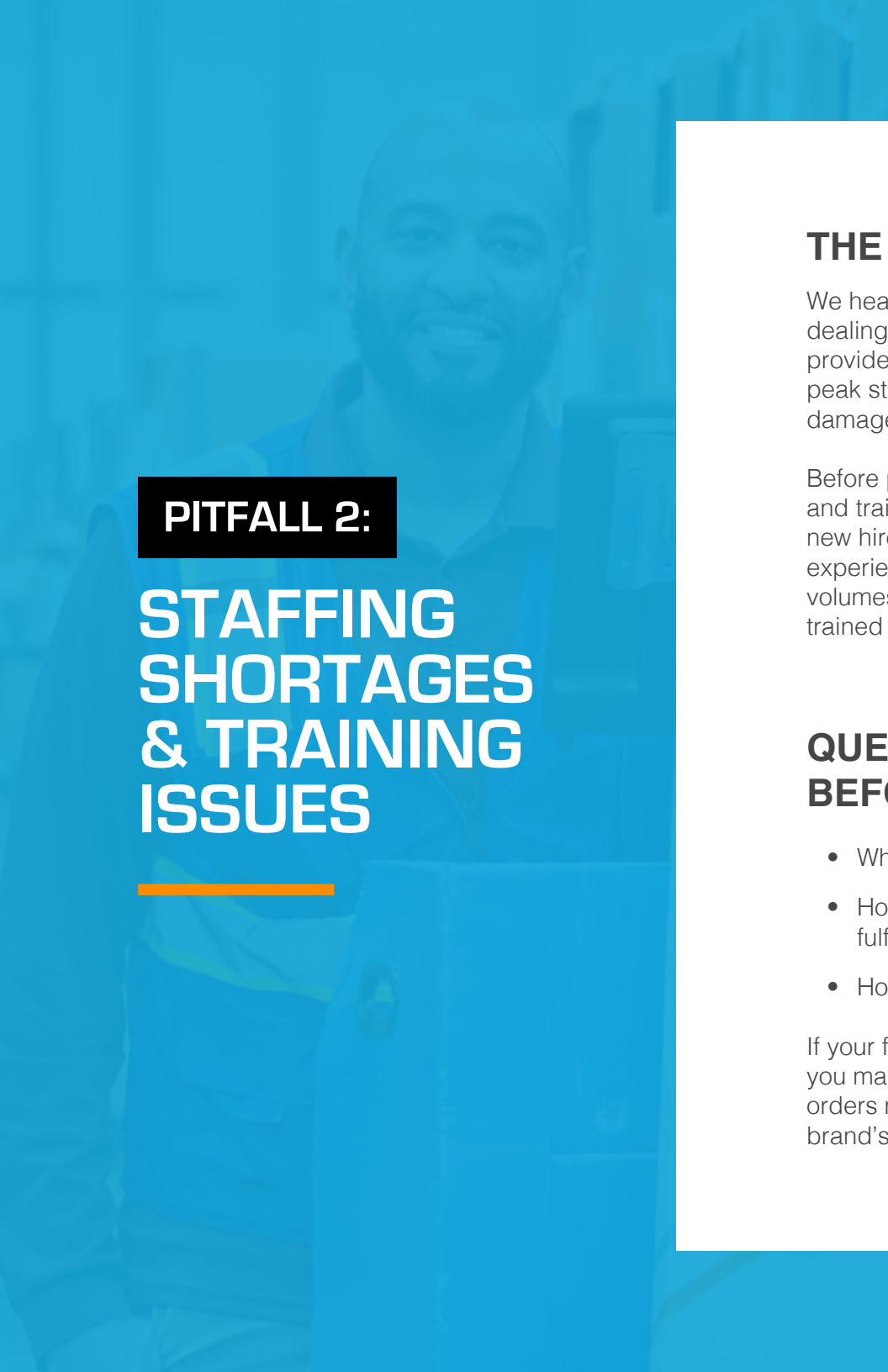
The cause is often simple: What the system shows as available is not what can actually be shipped. That gap might be small in August, but in November, it can turn into backorders before anyone notices.

Before things get crazy, confirm that your fulfillment partner runs a full physical inventory or equivalent validation to start the season with accurate numbers. Ask how often they check your fastest-selling products during peak and how quickly they resolve any mismatches. The best operations provide responsive updates and proof of adjustments so you have clear visibility.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROVIDER BEFORE PEAK:

- How often will you check my top-selling products?
- How do you handle inventory mismatches when you find them?
- How will you show me proof that the numbers have been corrected?

If your inventory data is wrong, nothing else in peak will run the way it should. Accurate numbers give you the confidence to plan campaigns, set ship dates, and keep customer promises.



PITFALL 2:

STAFFING SHORTAGES & TRAINING ISSUES

THE PROBLEM:

We hear from brands in Q1 who spent much of December dealing with missed ship dates and wrong items because their provider didn't have enough trained people on the floor before peak started. By the time seasonal staff were up to speed, the damage to customer trust was already being felt.

Before peak, confirm that your fulfillment partner starts hiring and training seasonal staff well ahead of time. Ask how they train new hires for accuracy and speed, and how they make sure experienced team members can cover high-demand areas when volumes spike. A strong provider should be able to reassign trained staff to prevent bottlenecks and keep orders moving.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROVIDER BEFORE PEAK:

- When do you start hiring for the holiday season?
- How long is the training period before seasonal staff start fulfilling orders?
- How do you reassign staff if certain areas get overloaded?

If your fulfillment team isn't ready before peak, every promise you make to customers is at risk. The right labor plan keeps orders moving, protects delivery commitments, and keeps your brand's momentum intact.



PITFALL 3:

CARRIER CAPACITY & SHIPPING DELAYS

THE PROBLEM:

Carrier networks hit their limits every holiday season. Promises of two-day delivery stretch to four or five, customer service teams get slammed, and tracking pages become the most-visited part of your website.

To combat this, confirm early how your fulfillment partner secures carrier capacity for peak. Ask whether they diversify across multiple carriers, how they decide which carrier gets which orders, and how they monitor performance during the season. They should also set and communicate realistic customer cutoff dates for each shipping method well before the first holiday orders go out.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROVIDER BEFORE PEAK:

- How early do you lock in extra carrier capacity?
- How do you decide which orders go to which carriers?
- How do you set and communicate shipping cutoff dates?

When carrier capacity is locked in and backup options are ready, you can keep delivery promises even in the busiest weeks of the year. A flexible, tested shipping plan protects both customer trust and sales momentum.



PITFALL 4:

MISALIGNMENT BETWEEN SALES & OPERATIONS

THE PROBLEM:

A big promotion can create the kind of order spike you want, and the kind of fulfillment slowdown you don't. We've heard brand stories about losing momentum when orders that should have shipped the same day were still on the floor two days later, turning a successful campaign into a service recovery project.

To fix this, share your promotional calendar well ahead of time so your provider can plan for the spike. Ask how they position high-volume SKUs before a sale, whether they can pre-pack bundles or bestsellers, and how they shift resources during the rush to keep orders moving. These steps protect delivery promises and keep your campaign running at full speed.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR PROVIDER BEFORE PEAK:

- How far in advance do you need to know about planned promotions?
- Can you pre-pack certain products or bundles ahead of a sale?
- How do you shift resources when a large spike in volume is expected?

If fulfillment can't keep pace with a promotion, campaign momentum disappears fast. When sales and fulfillment move together, you keep promises, protect revenue, and make the most of every promotion.

HOLIDAY LOGISTICS PREPARATION CHECKLIST

INVENTORY ACCURACY

Confirm a pre-peak full physical inventory or equivalent validation.

Ask how often your fastest-selling products are checked during peak.

Require proof of any corrections to system counts.

STAFFING AND TRAINING

Confirm early seasonal hiring and training timelines.

Ask how new hires are trained for accuracy and speed.

Ensure they can reassign trained staff to prevent bottlenecks.

CARRIER COORDINATION AND SHIPPING

Verify early carrier capacity planning.

Confirm multiple carriers are available and assigned by performance and cost.

Set and communicate realistic customer cutoff dates.

SALES AND OPERATIONS ALIGNMENT

Share your promotional calendar well in advance.

Ask about pre-packing and staging for high-volume products.

Confirm staffing and workflow adjustments for expected spikes.

CONCLUSION

The right expectations, questions, and partner accountability keep orders moving and customers happy when it matters most. Planning now prevents costly surprises later and sets the stage for a strong start to the new year.



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PEAK SEASON DOESN'T LEAVE MUCH ROOM FOR TRIAL AND ERROR.

The questions in this guide are meant to give you a clear starting point, so you can spot gaps early, set realistic expectations, and protect both customer trust and revenue during the busiest weeks of the year.

If you find that your Q4 doesn't go well and you want to explore options, [schedule a discovery call](#).

IDS is now part of DHL Supply Chain, so you get access to tech, visibility, and infrastructure that supports real scale. But what makes us different is how closely we work with each brand. You'll have a team that understands your day-to-day and helps build a fulfillment system that fits how you operate and where you're headed.

If it's the right time to understand your options, contact us directly at [\(866\) 232- 6533](tel:866-232-6533) or email at sales@idsfulfillment.com.