



8 Common Fulfillment Challenges of Wholesale and Distributor Businesses And How to Overcome Them



As a wholesale or distribution business, your ability to deliver on customer promises—on time and in full—is critical to maintaining strong B2B relationships and meeting service-level agreements. Fulfillment is where those promises are put to the test.

Even a small disruption—an unexpected stockout, a shipping delay—can damage your reputation with key accounts. And disrupt downstream operations.

Picture this: Customer A places a large order, expecting delivery on time and in full. But behind the scenes, VIP Customer B gets part of that inventory sooner. Then the future inventory you thought you had coming for Customer A was inaccurate. What should have been a seamless transaction flips into a source of frustration.

Fulfillment challenges are a reality for every wholesale and distribution business—but they don't have to be a liability. They can be opportunities to strengthen operations, reduce costs, and build trust.

The right tools can help you improve efficiency, increase accuracy, and scale with confidence. Here are eight of the most common fulfillment obstacles wholesalers and distributors face—and real solutions you can put in place.

8 Common Fulfillment Challenges of Wholesale and Distributor Businesses

1. Poor Inventory Visibility and Accuracy
2. Lack of Integration Across Systems
3. Demand Forecasting and Stock Replenishment
4. Making Changes to In-Flight Orders
5. Order Errors and Manual Processing
6. Inability to Scale to Meet Demand
7. Inability to Manage Multi-Channel Orders
8. Meeting Customer Promises (On Time and In Full)

1. Poor Inventory Visibility and Accuracy

The Challenge

Managing inventory across multiple warehouses or 3PLs can often feel like playing a never-ending game of catch-up. Without real-time, accurate inventory data, it's easy to



Preorder now
Ships on March 3

overcommit or under-allocate, resulting in delays, backorders, or lost sales.

How to Achieve Real-Time Inventory Availability

Imagine having all your inventory data in one place, updated in real-time, providing inventory awareness to all other systems so you never miss a beat. With Fluent Big Inventory, part of Fluent Order Management, you can centralize and manage stock levels with precision. This accuracy helps you manage stock levels, reduce errors, and keep customers happy by fulfilling orders on time and in full.

Pro Tip: Use real-time inventory insights to:

- Improve warehouse replenishment
- Optimize stock levels
- Reduce excess inventory and storage costs
- Predict future inventory needs

Key Questions to Ask:

- Is inventory visibility a problem?
- Where are the data silos in our current inventory systems?
- What systems can I integrate to improve data flow?

2. Lack of Integration Across Systems

The Challenge

Disconnected ERP, warehouse, EDI, and shipping systems create bottlenecks and data silos. Orders get lost in handoffs, and updates are delayed or missed altogether.

How to Connect Your Systems Seamlessly

Fluent Order Management acts as the connective tissue across your supply chain systems. It unifies order, inventory, and fulfillment data. Allowing you to respond faster, with more accuracy—without replacing legacy systems.

Pro Tip: Use middleware to connect legacy ERP or WMS systems to modern APIs. This creates a “flexibility layer” that improves agility without requiring a rip-and-replace.

Key Questions to Ask:

- How many different systems touch an order from start to finish?

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- Are data handoffs manual or automated?
 - Can we update all systems in real time when orders change?

3. Demand Forecasting and Stock Replenishment

The Challenge

Fluctuating customer demand, long lead times, and supplier variability make forecasting difficult. Without accurate forecasts, you risk tying up capital in excess stock—or worse, running out when demand spikes.

How to Predict Demand and Automate Replenishment

Fluent Order Management can analyze historical order patterns and real-time sales data to help predict demand. Automated replenishment triggers can be set based on thresholds, lead times, and supplier SLAs.

Pro Tip: Use demand signals from all sales channels—EDI, B2B portals, field sales—to create a more accurate forecast and align it with production and purchasing cycles.

Key Questions to Ask:

- How accurate are our current forecasts?
- Are we proactively replenishing based on real-time data?
- Can we allocate future inbound inventory to current demand?

4. Making Changes to In-Flight Orders

The Challenge

When B2B customers need to amend a large or complex order, inflexible systems often can't accommodate those changes mid-stream. This leads to manual workarounds, delays, and miscommunication.

How to Enhance Order Flexibility

Gain the flexibility to adapt to changes in real-time. Customer needs evolve. You can create custom order statuses and update orders as needed with Fluent Order Management. Whether it's adjusting quantities, changing delivery dates, or responding to external factors, you can refine orders to match changing customer needs.

This unified view of orders empowers your team to manage both

Your order will
ship on May 15



Your order now
ships on June 7

standard and exception scenarios. The result? Reduced delays and errors, smooth operations, and satisfied customers.

Pro Tip: Set up automated triggers for order updates. If an inbound shipment is delayed, create a rule to adjust affected orders and notify customers. Real-time integration with supplier systems can update order statuses based on external factors.

Key Questions to Ask:

- Can my teams make changes to in-flight orders?
- What are some of the common asks for customers in changing or updating their orders?
- Do changes to customer orders affect schedules? How are my customers notified of these changes?
- Will these changes result in repricing or resourcing? How do my current systems handle this?
- What rules do I need to have in place around what can be changed, and at what part of the order journey?

5. Order Errors and Manual Processing

The Challenge

Manual order entry, spreadsheets, and disconnected systems all increase the risk of human error. Especially with complex B2B orders involving custom SKUs, quantities, or pricing tiers.

How to Accelerate Your Order Processing

Streamline your order lifecycle by automating key checks and updates. The right system should eliminate manual bottlenecks, keeping orders moving at the speed your customers expect.

Fluent Order Management's event-driven architecture helps you fulfill orders quickly. Even external checks won't slow you down, since it integrates smoothly with your other systems.

Pro Tip: Automate key steps like fraud checks or compliance approvals. Use Fluent Order Management's event-driven triggers to keep orders moving. Streamline integrations with payment gateways and regulatory systems to reduce order processing times.

Key Questions to Ask:

- Do I currently have any manual processes in the fulfillment journey that are slowing my teams down?
- Does my team have to use multiple systems to ensure orders are fulfilled effectively?



- Is there an opportunity to streamline or automate some of the tasks around my order management?

6. Inability to Scale to Meet Demand

The Challenge

Scaling your fulfillment operations, especially during peak periods, can be challenging. You need systems flexible enough to handle fluctuating demand. Without, you risk delayed shipments, overwhelmed warehouses, and unhappy customers. The ability to scale without losing speed or accuracy is key to maintaining your brand's reputation.

How to Scale and Flex Your Operations

Be ready for anything, whether it's a seasonal rush or an unexpected spike in demand. Fluent Order Management's API-first, cloud-based architecture lets you scale your fulfillment operations dynamically.

With its cloud infrastructure, resources can be scaled up or down as needed. This keeps your operations matching the demand. Fluent also acts as a flexibility layer, ensuring your investments in legacy systems, like ERP, are fully optimized.

Pro Tip: Use scalability features with predictive analytics to forecast demand spikes. They allow you to adjust resources ahead of time, keeping your fulfillment operations strong and responsive. Real-time monitoring helps you optimize resource allocation during peak periods.

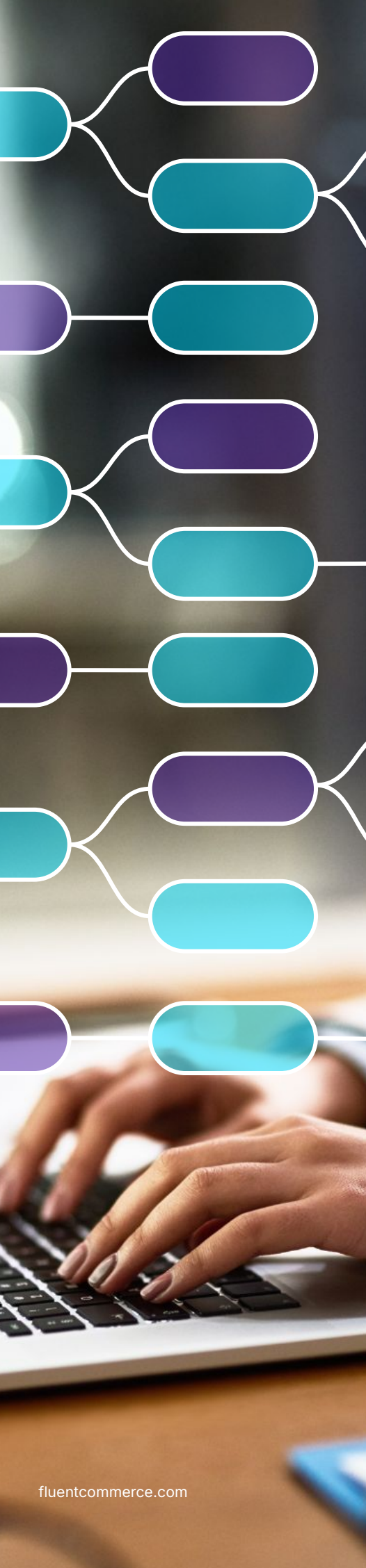
Key Questions to Ask:

- Do you have times where you have high spikes in activity, or key peak trading periods?
- Do you have any reliability issues with your existing system during these peak periods?
- Do your systems auto-scale to meet this demand without any interruptions?

7. Inability to Manage Multi-Channel Orders

The Challenge

Managing orders from retailers, B2B portals, EDI, and field sales reps—each with different workflows and data formats—can be overwhelming without a centralized system. Not to mention if you add international markets to the mix. Variables can include differing regulations, tariffs, and multi-location fulfillment strategies. These challenges



can make cross-border fulfillment feel overwhelming. Especially when trying to maintain efficiency and compliance across all regions.

How to Unify Multi-Channel Fulfillment

Navigate the complexities of cross-border operations with confidence. Fluent Order Management can be your glue that stitches together various external systems and processes, such as tax compliance, fraud checks, and regional shipping regulations. You can optimize every step of the fulfillment process by defining smart business rules and integrating your systems. Whether you're choosing the best regional hubs or managing international restrictions, you'll ensure compliance and efficiency. No matter where your orders are headed.

Pro Tip: Use Fluent Order Management's tiered sourcing logic to optimize cross-border shipments. Select the most efficient locations to minimize costs and delivery times. Review and adjust your sourcing strategies to respond to changing global trade dynamics.

Key Questions to Ask:

- Are we providing a consistent fulfillment experience across all channels?
- Are you fulfilling across different geographic regions?
- Are you looking to fulfill across different business units?

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8. Meeting Customer Promises (On Time and In Full)

The Challenge

Meeting OTIF (on time, in full) delivery expectations is critical in wholesale—especially when penalties are involved. But fragmented systems and lack of visibility make it hard to measure and improve performance.

How to Ensure Fulfillment Reliability

Fluent Order Management gives you real-time visibility into



every stage of the order lifecycle. Proactively identify at-risk orders, automate exception handling, and keep customers informed with accurate delivery timelines. Plus, you can amend orders, respond to sudden changes or the needs of VIP customers fast.

Pro Tip: Implement real-time order tracking and flexible delivery options. Use proactive notifications to keep customers (and your team) informed about their order status.

Key Questions to Ask:

- How often do we miss OTIF targets?
- Are we tracking order exceptions in real time?
- Can we notify customers proactively about delays or changes?

Next Steps: Empower Your Fulfillment Process with Fluent Order Management

Fulfillment is complex, but it doesn't have to be a constant source of stress. With the right strategies and tools, you can transform your fulfillment process to drive customer loyalty.

What's next?

- **Ready to take your fulfillment to the next level?** Schedule a [personalized demo](#).
- **Want to see how it works in real life?** Check out our [case studies](#). Learn more about how Fluent Order Management has helped brands like yours.
- **Looking to stay ahead of the curve?** Sign up for our [newsletter](#). You'll get the latest insights on fulfillment and order management straight to your inbox.

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