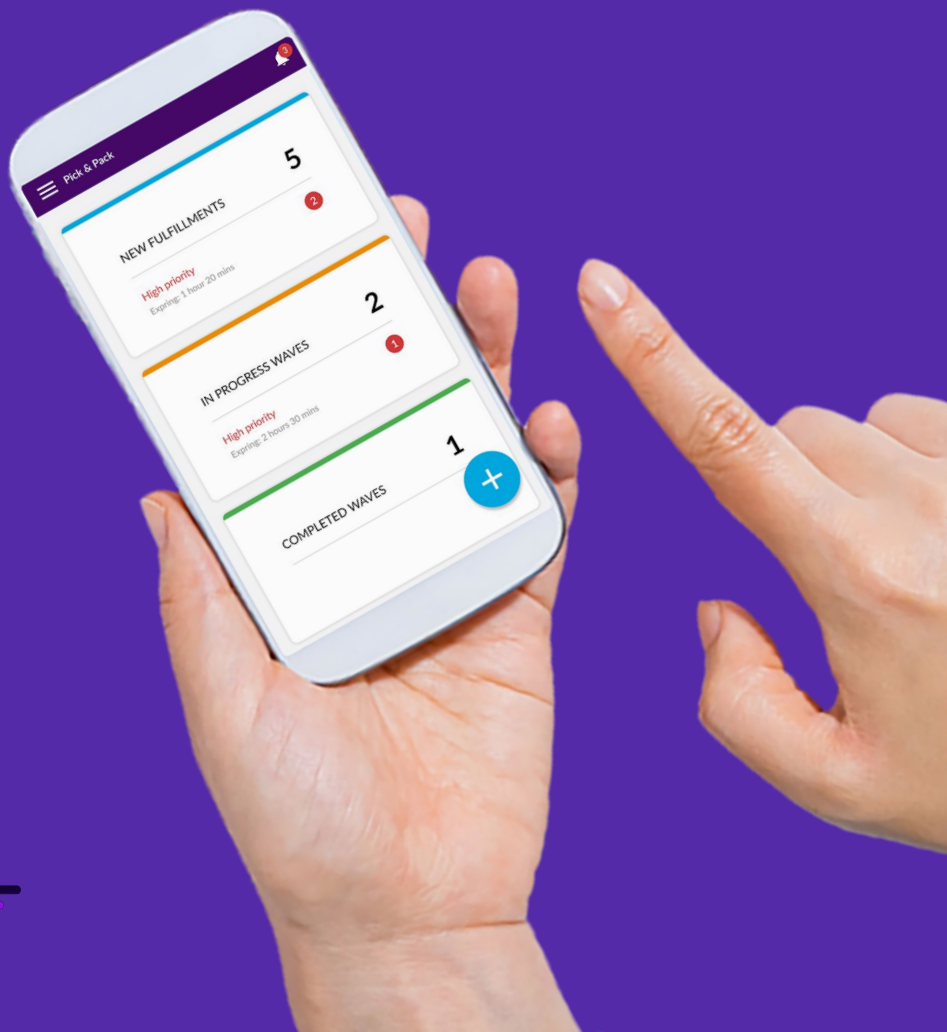
STORE FULFILLMENT

7 Ways to Boost In-Store Pick and Pack Efficiency

Optimize your pick and pack UX



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Introduction

Retailers have done an amazing job. In response to huge swings in consumer demand, they've rolled out curbside pickup and ship from store faster than ever. Often in days or weeks.

However, unlike distribution centers, stores weren't designed to optimize pick and pack processes. They're laid out to maximize in-store sales. Store staff face a similar challenge.

They don't have detailed knowledge of shipping and logistics. They're focused on sales and customer service. Unfortunately, this can make store fulfillment expensive.

As a result, smart retailers want to reduce the time it takes to pick and pack each order. So here are seven ways to increase efficiency when you offer in-store pickup, curbside pickup, or Ship from Store.

01

Don’t track every pick, just the exceptions

For busy store associates, speed matters. If you don’t have dedicated pickers, it’s crucial to expedite the process as much as possible. Firstly, because you need to get inventory off the sales floor fast, so it’s not accidentally sold (resulting in a canceled order). Secondly, it gives associates more time to juggle the responsibility of helping store customers.

One way to expedite this is to skip the scanning of items (or entry of a pick quantity for each line item) during the pick process. Just have staff enter data for the short picks. This reduces the time it takes for each pick and lets them spend more time helping customers. What’s more, analysis of short pick data can be gold for fine-tuning your replenishment strategy, analyzing demand trends, and can also improve stock accuracy.

You might also consider picking during off hours, before the store opens, to give staff more time to complete pick tasks. That way, you can pull inventory quickly, and pack it later.

02

Have dedicated packers

In a store, picking is best done by staff that work on the sales floor. Why? Because they have intimate knowledge of your products (which reduces picking errors) and where to find them (which reduces travel time, especially if a product is displayed in multiple locations). But packing is different.

Packers need to be trained in how to package products to reduce the likelihood of damage during shipment. But because they don't require detailed product knowledge or sales skills, you can often use cheaper resources for this process. And a dedicated packer will be able to get orders ready for shipment or collection much faster than a staff member who is switching between the backroom and the sales floor.

03

Enable staff to pick by location

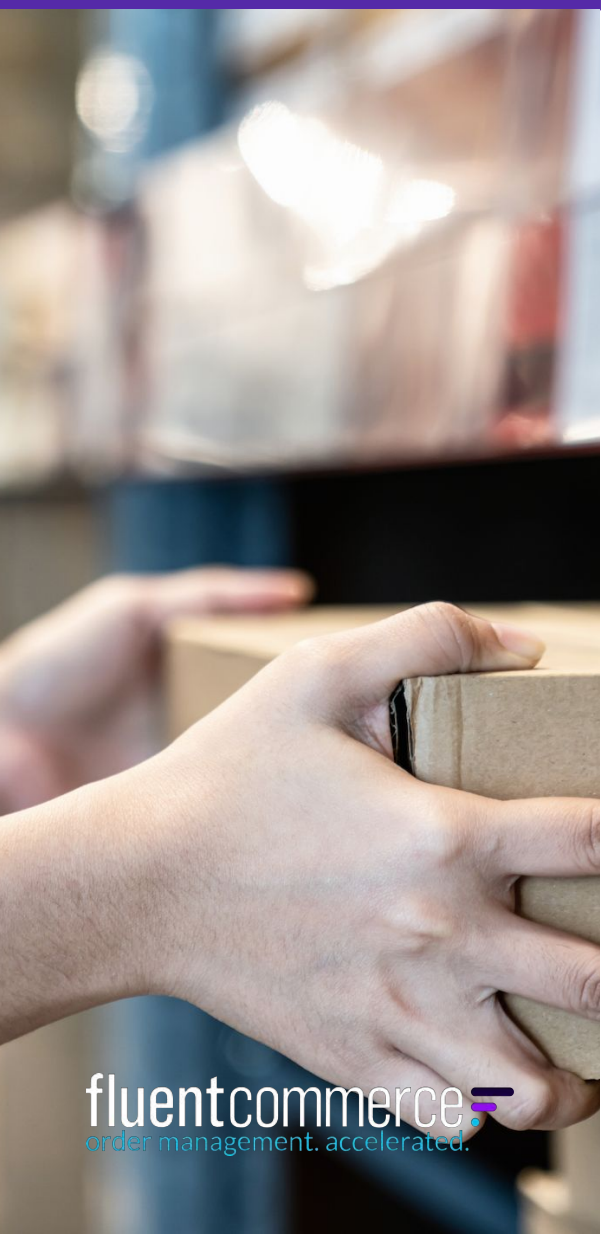
In a large warehouse pick tasks are optimized to reduce travel time. So, if you're picking large volumes of orders, it may make sense to apply this same efficiency to your stores. There are two ways to achieve this:

- **Automated Location Picks** - With this method, line items from different orders are grouped together. A single pick task may include just one item, or multiple items from a single area of your store. And pick tasks can be split across multiple team members - for example, according to their department. In addition, for larger picks, pick-run optimization can be used to sort the pick list so it guides the picker from one location to another using the most efficient path through the store.
- **Manual Location Picks** - For smaller store formats, automation may not be necessary. Instead, you could simply display the location of each item on the picklist so store staff can see which items are in the same aisle or section of the store.

Whether you automate the grouping of pick tasks or manage them manually, remember, every step saved is time staff can use to help make another sale.

04

Don’t require staff to enter a staging location



In an efficient, modern warehouse, every inventory move is tracked.
Warehouse workers follow strict processes and often scan inventory ‘in’ and ‘out’ of each location. This not only helps with inventory accuracy, but it provides a large data set that can be analyzed to improve warehouse efficiency. But stores are different.

Unlike a warehouse, inventory locations in a retail store don’t have barcodes. And particularly in a smaller store (and often large ones too) staging locations for different types of orders such as Click and Collect and Ship from Store are well known and clearly labeled.

Therefore, once your staff have finished picking and packing an order, or group of orders, your system should be flexible enough that they don’t need to scan or enter a staging location for parcels that are ready for collection. All your system needs to know is that the orders are packed so a status notification can be sent to your customer.

05

Track items in special in-store locations

Pick and pack efficiency requires a high level of coordination, organization, and attention to detail. Staff need to know where to look for items or it will increase the time it takes to complete a pick task.

While aisle and shelf numbers are pretty standard, in a store, stock can be in other locations too. It could be in a featured display area, on a mannequin or in a backroom.

So, when you roll out Ship from Store, think about how you can help staff find items in non-standard locations. For example, you might create special codes that can be displayed on a picklist that indicate where items can be located, even if they’re not on a typical shelf.

That way you’ll increase picking efficiency and reduce the chance of a short pick.

06

Enable easy reprints

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In a busy retail environment, it's not always possible to complete a task in a single effort. Interruptions occur.

This means, sometimes packing slips or labels get misplaced. Yet some systems don't provide the flexibility for staff to easily reprint individual packing slips and labels in case one is damaged or lost. The impact?

Chaos. Staff have to scramble to work around the issue. Otherwise it can result in order errors or cancelation. So when you map out your in-store pick and pack process, don't forget to consider all the exceptions, such as a lost packing slip or label.

07

Consider dedicated inventory and staff for store fulfillment

Let's face it. If you use traditional store staff to pick and pack ecommerce orders, it's not nearly as efficient as the pick and pack process in a warehouse.

For store fulfillment to make sense, the benefits of faster and/or cheaper delivery have to outweigh this added labor cost. Which they often do. But some retailers, in a quest for better margins, now use a blended approach.

They've selected some stores to act as fulfillment 'hubs'. These hub stores have dedicated space and inventory in the backroom for online order fulfillment. They also have dedicated staff.

This lets them achieve almost warehouse-like pick and pack efficiency yet reap the benefits of shipping from a location closer to the customer for faster delivery and/or reduced delivery costs.

In addition, they still retain the flexibility of being able to use store inventory to fill online orders, if needed.

Summary

With eCommerce at an all-time high, profitable delivery is essential. This means a flexible order management system that lets you adapt the in-store pick and pack process is more important than ever.

Some retailers may need more steps to increase accuracy. Others will need less to boost pick and pack speed. The important thing is that your system can meet your unique needs.... both now and in the future.

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Ready to boost your pick and pack efficiency?

To learn how Fluent Order Management can help you optimize your store fulfillment, request a demo today.

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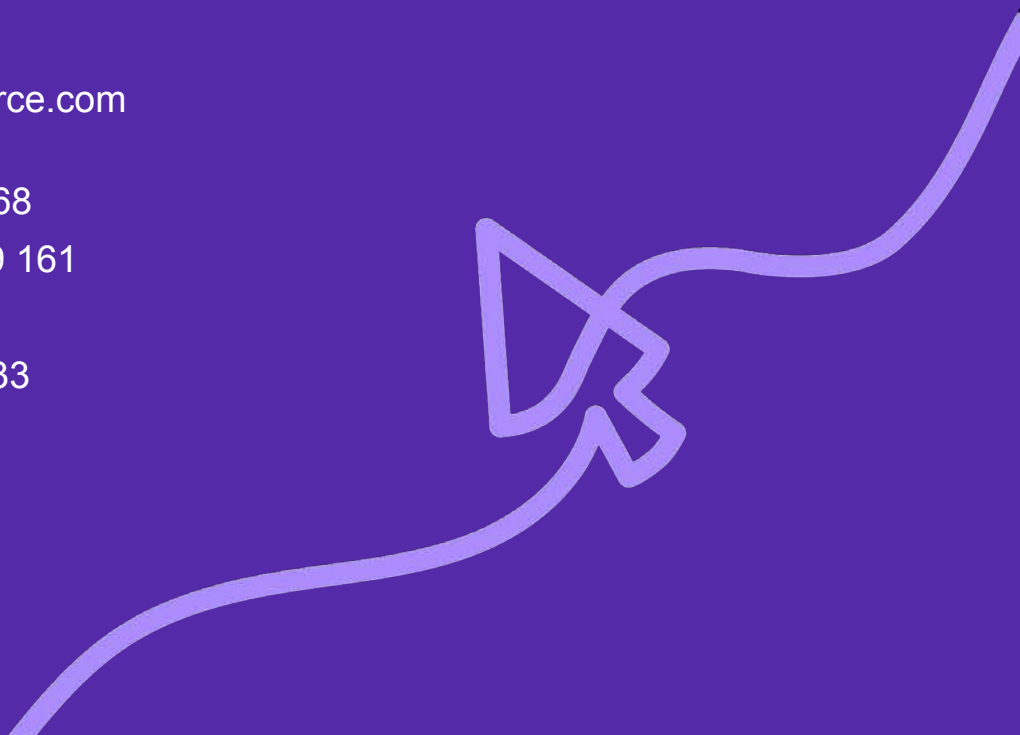

ABOUT

Fluent Commerce

Fluent Commerce is a global software company focused on distributed order management for omnichannel retail. Fluent Order Management is a cloud native, fully managed and highly flexible platform. It includes the essential components for unified, headless commerce: Distributed order management, in-store pick and pack, inventory and location management, customer service, fulfillment optimization and reporting. This enables retailers and brands to enhance all their customer touchpoints whilst increasing their profit on every order.

For more information visit:

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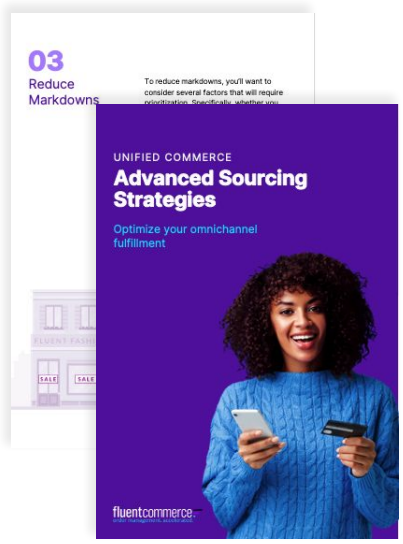

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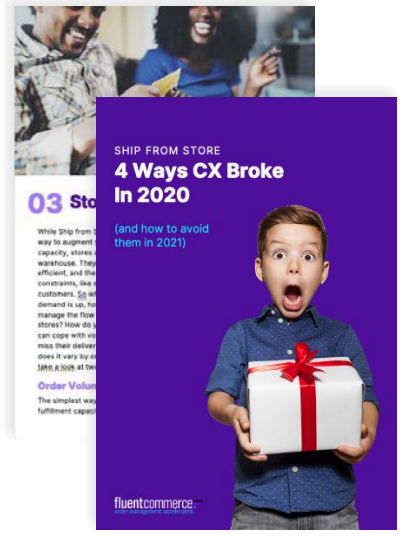

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