

A series of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes in shades of purple, teal, and blue, positioned in the upper left quadrant of the page.A thin, curved teal line that starts near the top right and extends towards the center of the page.

## Ecommerce fulfillment

The facts and fumbles brands can't turn a blind eye to any longer

Every brand wants to be the next household name, but what's the special sauce that takes a business's performance and earnings from so-so to spectacular?



Many factors contribute to brand success, and although each brand's approach may differ from the next, all brands eventually need third-party logistics (3PL) and nationwide fulfillment solutions to assure customers receive their orders fast and on time with as few issues as possible.



**This makes for happy customers who are the lifeblood of your brand and lousing up the fulfillment of their orders is one of the fastest ways to lose them.**

There are a lot of moving parts to running a business, and it's tempting for brand builders to focus on the fun, sexy stuff that makes entrepreneurship so attractive. But, consider yourself warned – never, ever overlook the far less seductive aspect of order fulfillment.

Your brand can offer the best products in the world and plunk a boatload of money into presentation and marketing, but if it fumbles the fulfillment process, you'll lose the trust and respect of your customers—and that means losing sales. If this is the stuff that keeps you up at night, keep reading.



## First things first. What are the basics you should know about fulfillment?

Fulfillment is the part of a brand's operations that delivers products to customers. It includes everything from warehousing and managing inventory to picking, packing and shipping those orders from strategically placed warehouses around the country.

Why is it so important? The right fulfillment infrastructure solution can soothe all of the aches and pains often associated with getting your products into the hands of paying customers—and keep them coming back. A product's fulfillment journey begins with order placement and usually ends with delivery, but sometimes the logistics continue after an order is received (for example, if a customer starts a return).

The typical fulfillment lifecycle looks like this:







## 1. Order placement

When a customer purchases a product, order details are sent to an order management system (OMS). These details may include item description and quantity, plus shipping details and delivery address.

If the company has implemented a 3PL and nationwide fulfillment solution, the OMS will automatically determine which warehouse should ship the item based on the delivery address and item availability.


In some cases, one order with multiple items may be fulfilled from several warehouses just to make sure the customer gets each item on time.




## 2. Picking inventory

Next, the merchant has to locate and pluck the ordered item from its warehouse shelves. As with all steps in the fulfillment journey, time is of the essence when picking inventory.

The sooner the item is accurately picked, the sooner it can be packed and shipped. To make sure things run smoothly and quickly, merchants implement a variety of picking strategies, including but not limited to:

 **Piece picking** – a picker gathers products one order at a time

 **Zone picking** – individual pickers gather items within their designated zones inside the warehouse and all items are collated at the end

 **Batch picking** – individual pickers simultaneously gather products for several orders in batches



### 3. Sorting

The picked item is then sorted based on its final destination. During this point in the fulfillment journey, workers ensure the item is present and in good condition for packing and shipping.



### 4. Packing

This part of the process includes weighing and labeling the package for shipping. Whether protectively packed in custom packaging or a plain corrugated shipping box, the merchant prioritizes easily handled dimensions and cost-effective weights.



### 5. Shipping

Next, it's time for your customer's order to start the trip toward its intended and final destination. The item may be shipped directly to the customer or consolidated with others headed to nearby locations. This cuts costs by minimizing the total number of shipments leaving the warehouse.



### 6. Delivery

The last mile is the final step and possibly the most crucial step in the product journey. This is when your customer's order is loaded onto a carrier's truck, leaves the final transportation hub and is finally delivered!





## 7. Reverse logistics

An item may be returned if it doesn't meet any number of your customer's expectations – or if they just simply changed their mind. In any case, a quick, sustainable and seamless return process is important to your customers and vital to your business.

When your customer's order is delivered or returned accurately, quickly and safely, they're likely to be satisfied, tell their friends about your product, return to your store and leave glowing reviews.

The key to that accurate, quick and safe delivery or return, however, is a 3PL and nationwide fulfillment solution that can help your brand compete with industry titans and startup darlings who often have massive resources and infrastructure at their disposal.

But, what happens if you don't have the right fulfillment infrastructure in place? Your brand is likely to make epic fumbles that can take a big bite out of profits.

## Which fulfillment fumbles affect my bottom line the most?

For brands that met their start in kitchens and garages, the idea of fulfillment was as simple as "box it and ship it." But, as companies grow, they also outgrow. Those garages become warehouses and logistics become a lot more complicated.

There comes a time in every brand's journey when its team must decide when to scale and how, and a substantial part of that decision involves fulfillment strategy. Having the best product and lots of it does a merchant no good if it can't get that product into the hands of paying, satisfied and returning customers.




## Three bonafide fulfillment flubs that can negatively affect revenue:





### 1. Siloed applications in the fulfillment process

For merchants, a customer's ability to find their products and place orders quickly and easily is only half the battle. To meet their growth goals, every ecommerce brand should implement a robust fulfillment solution – one that offers a complete sightline across operations to forecast inventory levels, monitor cycle times and review shipping costs. Such a system assures orders are fulfilled on time and that customers receive the ultimate digital shopping experience.

Without one, brands run the risk of having a disconnect between their customer-facing and backend systems (think storefront vs. logistics). This siloing can contribute to major profit losses thanks to subsequent problems, such as:

 **Performing manual data entry** – Without streamlined fulfillment automation, some teams might find themselves spending valuable time and resources typing out individual sales orders, comparing and updating inventory counts, creating shipping labels or communicating changes across departments.

 **Incorrect inventory counts** – One incorrect or forgotten update or miscount and all hell breaks loose. Next thing you know, you're selling inventory you don't have, wasting time and resources processing refunds and trying to counterbalance poor customer experiences.

 **Being unable to handle more orders** – This limits a brand's ability to scale, which cuts directly into profits. With siloed processes come missed or incorrect orders, delayed shipments or missing inventory. Without capable fulfillment solutions in place, merchants run the risk of poor planning and forecasting making them likely to repeat these fumbles in the future.



## 2. Inability to keep up with industry changes

Ecommerce technology, practices and standards update relatively often, which makes it challenging but all the more important for brands to keep up and compete. With a deep understanding of modern ecommerce, capable 3PL and nationwide fulfillment solutions can help companies strategize and execute entire logistics journeys, end to end.

A capable fulfillment service provider can offer long-term inventory storage and stockpiling. It can also navigate Fulfillment by Amazon (FBA) restock limits and product preparations while improving integrations and support for the latest advancements.



## 3. Paying high costs and depending on unreliable labor

Implementing multiple fulfillment service providers to get your products into the hands of paying customers often means high costs and unreliable labor.

On the flip side, a complete distribution and logistics solution helps brands focus on their vision while a robust fulfillment infrastructure handles the picking, packing, shipping and storage of products.

With a complete solution, one that covers every step in the fulfillment journey, brands experience more affordable pricing, low labor turnover rates and less dependency on temporary hires during peak seasons.





## How does all of this affect customer experience and satisfaction?

If you want happy customers who always return and write glowing reviews when they do, you need fast, uncomplicated and predictable fulfillment infrastructure processes. Your customers want quality products that meet their expectations—and they want them now! The days of waiting a week or more for an everyday item to arrive are over.

In fact, studies show that 48% of online shoppers are more than happy to pay extra for faster shipping. In this regard, Amazon has solidified its position as the most reliable marketplace with 64% of consumers saying that when they want a product fast, they go to Amazon. This accounts for why Amazon is the giant it is today, but that doesn't mean small and medium enterprises (SMEs) can't experience the same relative success.

**A robust 3PL and nationwide fulfillment infrastructure can automate and streamline your brand's fulfillment processes, help you manage inventory, warehouse your orders and offer fast nationwide delivery – just like the big guys!**



Today's marketplace is super competitive, especially for online sellers. So, you have to stay on your toes and aim to stand out in a crowd of merchants selling the same or similar products to yours.

To that end, a pleasant and unique customer experience can be just the thing to help your brand differentiate itself from the pack and give it a valuable competitive advantage.

Consumers have so many options and so little time. So, when they find a brand they love, they're likely to become faithful to it instead of searching for one that offers more, different or better.

Therefore, when you provide customers with excellent service by meeting or surpassing their expectations, you build brand loyalty that drives repeat business and rave reviews. This will help amplify the reach of your brand and grow your customer base, which means more revenue and lower new customer acquisition costs.



## So, what's the bottom line?

In a nutshell, automating and streamlining your fulfillment process creates a better overall customer experience by eliminating system inefficiencies. With fewer late or missing shipments, your team won't get stuck performing repetitive time-sucking tasks like fielding customer complaints and tracking down or replacing orders.

Instead, they'll be rewarded with more resources and time to focus on improving customer experience, loyalty and retention. Fulfillment solutions that run quickly and smoothly will not only save time and money but also minimize profit losses, maximize profitability, and help scale your business fast.



To learn more about strategic nationwide fulfillment for your brand, visit us online at [Cart.com](https://www.cart.com).

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