



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

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Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

From the Golden Zone

10 strategies to optimize your warehouse operations

By *Kenneth Ruehrdanz*

Looking for a core set of components for aligning your warehouse and distribution center logistics with your business strategies? Try “The 10 Strategies to Optimize Warehouse Operations.”

The strategies are created from proven solutions aimed at eliminating non-value-adding activities and addressing the business drivers that are most important to you. Intelligently applied, they bring an organization’s logistics strategy into alignment with business strategy and help provide a competitive edge in your market sector.

Strategy 1: Reduce time wasted traveling.

Depending on the size of the operation, a significant portion of an order picker’s time is spent traveling between picks. Deploy methods that reduce travel time, condense the pick face, and allow your staff to work smarter. Potential solutions: flow rack, optimized flow paths, dynamic slotting.

Strategy 2: Move orders to zones. Consider methods that manage the flow of materials for faster, more efficient order assembly and consolidation. Send order containers only to the zones where picking activity is required. Potential solutions: zone route conveyor networks, pick carts.

Strategy 3: Batch orders and sort. By grouping and concurrently picking SKUs for multiple orders, the order pickers become more productive. The order picker does not need to

revisit the same location over and over. Pick multiples of each SKU in one pass and sort to orders. Potential solutions: pick carts, pick-to-tote and sort.

Strategy 4: Eliminate travel, split case selection and replenishment. Instead of the pickers going out into the warehouse to locate and pick split case items, consider systems that bring the inventory to the picker, who remains in one location. Potential solution: goods-to-person pick stations supported with automated staging system for inventory.

Strategy 5: Eliminate travel, full case selection and replenishment. As an alternate to pickers going out into the warehouse to locate and pick cases, consider systems that bring the cases directly to a palletizer. Release cases in the best sequence to build pallets. Potential solution: automated case buffer system with semi-automated palletizing.

Strategy 6: Buffering and sequencing. As portions of customer orders are picked, the items or cases could be consolidated into a buffer storage system as a method of optimizing the process. Furthermore, there may be a need to organize the contents of each order into a sequence. Potential solution: automated staging system.

Strategy 7: Free picking. By making the SKU that you don’t pick become the SKU you pick, you essentially pick one and get one for free. For example, transfer five cases from one pallet to create an

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order, thereby creating another order with the remaining cases. Potential solution: negative pick software.

Strategy 8: Layer pick. Optimize picking activity with layer picking — a system for the automated handling of whole layers from pallets. Get more order assembly faster with less labor. Potential solution: layer picking robots.

Strategy 9: Mixed-case palletizing. Determine if the case assembly process for mixed-case palletizing is efficient. This complex process can be streamlined with semi-automated or automated sys-

tems. Potential solutions: staging buffer system linked to ergonomic palletizer systems, case pick and sort.

Strategy 10: Go real time. Make sure you get rid of the paper and operate with real-time systems. Gain visibility, obtain real-time operational status, and monitor labor productivity. Potential solutions: warehouse control system software, dashboards, voice- and light-directed activities.

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