



The Pain of Packing in an E-Commerce World

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For any business with a B2C component, the warehouse has changed dramatically over the last few years. Many retailers are closing or scaling back their brick and mortar shops in favor of increasing their direct to consumer business. Others are maintaining the same level of operations, shipping to stores and other retailers but wrestling with the challenges of supporting omni-channel operations.

With ecommerce volume growing quickly, it is shaping how businesses sell their products, and forcing changes onto the warehouse. While picking seems to get the attention when it comes to omni-channel efficiency, packing is an overlooked area when small changes could make a world of difference. In several operations we've seen where ecommerce has grown from as much as 5 percent of the business to 30 percent, picking operations are being revamped to accommodate the typical new profile of many more, smaller orders. However, challenges continue after orders are

picked, where operations are tasked with an expanded role for their packing operations.

Value Added Services

One large apparel company we work with sees their ecommerce business ebb and flow as any seasonal business does, especially during the holiday season. But what really throws their packers off are the flash sales and ever more value added services. Typically, in a flash sale consumers will purchase multiple sizes of the same item to make sure which size

“Our customers can ask for their own pack lists, their own ship labels on the box, and they can specify what information they want. On top of that, we are always running promotions so depending on the SKU or customer, we may have a different inserts to go into the box. Plus we offer a lot of value-added services and they constantly change. Seeing all of this information on a screen when a box is scanned, and telling our people what they need to know, has changed our process. It's current, accurate, and right at their fingertips.”

fits, resulting in a nice new outfit for them but many more returns for the retailer. And value adds such as gift packaging, customization of products and the ever popular “hassle free packaging” means a long list of potential packing changes.

Look at any pack station or watch packers work, and you will notice they have “the book.” It's typically the large three-ring binder where SOPs are maintained to give workers the details on how certain products should be packed. The details can be endless ranging from specialty wrapping for high ticket items to special coupons or inserts for special sales to items to allow for returns. The book exists because the system those packers use cannot accommodate the rapid rate of changes and personalization. And that's just thinking from a retail apparel perspective. What if we add to the mix hazmat items, combustibles, drugs or novelties?

Imagine how much slower your workers are because they have to page through that three ring binder. And, how many mistakes are made? How much time is

lost while a worker is flipping through the book? Think about what happens when temporary workers are hired. Well, those two numbers will increase dramatically.

Customizing the Process

Packers generally go through a large



DMLogic's software development platform, STEPLogic's packing app enables customers to develop their own packing screens with all the pertinent information to allow their warehouse to main their same level of operation as their

apps that sit on top of the WMS, requiring no changes to the core code.

How are our customers using STEPLogic

1. Creating alternative receiving processes for new or temporary employees
2. Dynamically personalizing RF messages
3. Personalized packing screens to respond to customer requirements
4. Integration of weight check into the picking process
5. Monitoring and auditing of vendors

training process. They could be the most highly trained in the warehouse. But that doesn't eliminate the fact that changes happen and they happen often on the packing end. Customizing the screens they see when they scan the box at their packing station is a game-changer and one that could relieve all the pain associated with the packing process.

ecommerce business expanded. With a current customer, we've seen increased packer productivity and a greater efficiency resulting in costs savings and more product out the door at the end of every shift.

Using a series of apps, STEPLogic personalizes your system while leaving the core software alone. That also makes upgrades easier and less costly, benefitting both you and your software vendor. And by taking advantage of our app exchange, you'll benefit from the expertise of other customers as well.

Instead of the big binder, imagine a scene where a packer scans a tote or box that has been directed to their station. The screen then instructs them exactly what they should do with those items. Everything in the three-ring binder is now in front of them. Descriptions, photos, instructions. Their process just got infinitely faster and easier.

STEPLogic can walk users through a series of steps to build apps to customize and personalize any of their warehouse operations, not just packing STEPLogic is built as a series of



About the Author

Lynn Dermott is a senior supply-chain consultant with more than 20 years of experience of warehouse management software (WMS) planning, developing and implementation. Specializing in the pharmaceutical, third party logistics, publishing and retail industries, Lynn began her career as a MARC WMS software developer and eventually became a lead architect. She has earned a strong reputation for her responsive and professional support of clients, and for her creative approach to problem-solving. Lynn holds a BBA in Information Systems from the University of Cincinnati.



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