

## 5 QUESTIONS TO ASK A POTENTIAL FULFILLMENT AND DISTRIBUTION PARTNER

GOING BEYOND EXECUTION TO SERVE AS PARTNERS  
FOR OUR CLIENTS' MARKETING OPERATIONS

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Entering into a relationship with a fulfillment services company is among the most serious decisions you will make for your business.

With an extensive global economy, fulfillment encompasses much more than shipping and receiving. A good fulfillment partner will help your business with a variety of operational tasks including customer service, billing and finance, inventory tracking, internet marketing, analytics, technical support, and more.

You just need to be ready to do your homework to make sure your distribution partner is equipped to give you what you need.

Here are five questions you need to ask a potential partner before committing to the relationship.

## 1. WHAT'S YOUR AVERAGE DELIVERY TIME WITHIN THE CONTINENTAL US?

Anyone who has ever ordered a product online or over the phone knows just how important this question is. When an order comes quickly, we are thrilled. But delays are frustrating to say the least— especially if the company we're ordering from can't provide a reasonable explanation. Depending on the location and practices of a distribution facility, packages may arrive as quickly as a couple days after an order is placed or could take up to a week or more for delivery.

A distribution center located in the D.C. metro area, for example would have a much longer delivery time for a person who ordered online from Washington State than someone who placed the same order in Maryland—even if the Maryland order was placed a day or more later.



This kind of discrepancy is one of the reasons it's often a smart decision for businesses based on either coast to partner with a fulfillment service in the central US.

A fulfillment partner that is based in a central location, such as Ohio, can get packages to locations across the continental United States in 1-3 days without having to resort to expensive expedited shipping.

If you choose the right partner, you and your customers won't have to pay a premium for fast delivery.



## 2. HOW EASY WILL IT BE FOR ME AND MY TEAM TO ACCESS YOUR FULFILLMENT DATA?

Even as a procurement professional, chances are you started working for your current business because you believed in the product or company, not because you had an abiding affection for logistics. Still, even when you outsource these tasks to a domestic fulfillment company, you want to be aware of what is happening with your business.

It shouldn't be a pain to get figures from your partner.

While there are probably a few fulfillment and distribution companies that are still keeping records in paper files or their own internal network, more and more businesses are turning to web-based platforms where information is securely stored in the cloud where it can be accessed anywhere there is an internet connection and a compatible device.

With the right technology, your partner's logistics software can integrate smoothly into your own IT system, allowing you to keep an

eye on both business to business relationships and business to consumer transactions. Different departments within your organization can even be granted a certain level of access to the system, depending on their needs.

A single customer doesn't need to know billing information for your entire customer base, for example, but they'll certainly want to know where their package is in the queue and when they can expect to receive it—both details that will be logged by your fulfillment and distribution team.

## 3. HOW DO YOU GUARANTEE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION?

It wasn't so long ago that your primary method of interacting with a dissatisfied customer was in fielding calls from the small percentage who would take the time to call and complain when something went wrong.

Things have changed a lot in the last few years.

Now, customers don't need to sit on hold. With the near ubiquity of social media, consumers are able to go online to sound off on their experience with various products and businesses. And a social network rant can quickly cause a lot of damage to your brand, driving away customers either temporarily or permanently.

An efficient fulfillment service provider should be able to guarantee a high level of customer satisfaction— as high as 99% when it comes to getting each order accurate the first time.

IT systems should facilitate a strong line of communication— with suppliers, manufacturers, warehouses, and finance departments— that lets you know what to expect, so you can keep your customers informed as well.





#### 4. DO YOU HAVE STRATEGIES IN PLACE FOR HANDLING SUPPLIER ERRORS?

Most companies try to keep costs down by looking to overseas suppliers. While products are often less expensive, other problems are created. Mistakes can happen with any manufacturer, both human and machine error, but they do tend to happen more frequently when you're dealing with overseas suppliers. A decimal point gets misplaced and suddenly your 1000 unit PO is only 100. Products can be marked incorrectly or not labeled at all, package quantities can be incorrect, delays with ocean transit or custom clearance can happen. All of which are problems that must be addressed before the merchandise is received into the distribution facility and ready for shipment back out to your customers.

The right fulfillment partner puts quality checks in place to mitigate these issues and should provide you the real-time visibility to inventory and the metrics you need to manage the quality of your suppliers.

#### 5. HOW DO YOU SCALE UP OR SCALE DOWN OPERATIONS?

Most businesses go through demand cycles. In some companies, this translates into sometimes experiencing peak ordering periods that exceed regular demand and can require more hands on deck.

A fulfillment and distribution partner can offer flexibility in these situations. They might work with outside temporary contractors to help process seasonal needs and then scale back again once this period has ended.

But you must have these strategies in place before you need them-- you don't want to be left playing catch up.

There are many ways to predict the highs and lows of ordering and distribution both overall, and with specific product lines. Your partner can keep a close track of inventory and sales history in order to forecast work-force needs. It's also important that your team is able to interpret economic conditions as the ups and downs of the economy typically have an impact on demand—and thus your workforce.

Your fulfillment provider also needs to know how to respond to product sales, which can mean ramping up processing, then scaling things back when the sale is over.

#### AERO HAS THE ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS.

At Aero Fulfillment, we are ready to answer any of these questions or others you may have on managing your distribution and fulfillment. We've been in the business since 1986, and we've weathered all of the changes to the industry. And we realize that, as time goes by, we're going to see even more.

Modern consumers demand an agile and flexible fulfillment operation that can do more than ship packages. Your business needs a partner that brings value—offering insight, strategy, and superior customer service.

Give us a call today to see how an experienced fulfillment team can help reduce inefficiency and keep your customers satisfied. We can help you with the services you need to enhance and grow your business into exactly what you want it to be.



