How to Use Accurate Fulfillment and Delivery Dates to Boost Customer Satisfaction

WHITEPAPER

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As a consumer, how many times have you gone to a website to buy something specific, only to ditch the buying journey because the retailer or brand couldn't tell you when your order would be delivered?

Whether it's B2B or B2C, shoppers expect transparent and accurate buying experiences. It's no longer sufficient to confirm orders after the fact; customers expect to see delivery timelines during the purchasing process itself.

Research has found that consumers prioritize accurate fulfillment dates over fast shipping. Presenting accurate fulfillment dates — often referred to as delivery "promise dates" — on the product detail page (PDP) and cart and checkout gives customers an assurance of when they can expect their package.

However, presenting accurate fulfillment dates on an ecommerce site requires shared services and data between the ecommerce platform and order management system. In this article, I'll dive into the benefits of presenting fulfillment and delivery dates and how to leverage commerce technology to ensure accuracy and transparency.



Why Customers Want to See Accurate Fulfillment Dates

According to Forrester, 68% of US consumers want to confirm the fulfillment date on the website before placing an order. Whether a customer needs a product for a special occasion, or a B2B buyer needs to meet an SLA agreement, there are several reasons customers want to see estimated delivery times on your website:

- **Decision to Purchase:** Fulfillment dates can influence purchasing decisions, providing assurance on when the shopper or buyer will get the item. Even a delivery that is further out is far better than no delivery date visibility.

- **Urgency to Get the Product:** Some shoppers may have urgent needs for the products they're purchasing. Accurate fulfillment dates help them gauge whether the delivery will meet their timeframe.

- **Plan to Receive the Product:** There are some types of items that typically need the shopper to be available to receive the shipment, for example, large items (furniture), items that require installation (appliances), items that are perishable (groceries), or items that require signature (high value items). In these cases, accurate delivery dates and times allow shoppers to plan their schedules accordingly. This experience can be enhanced even more by offering shoppers the opportunity to select their preferred delivery time windows, granting them added flexibility and convenience.

- **Plan to Pick up the Product:** Accurate fulfillment dates are absolutely necessary for buy online, pick up in store (BOPIS) orders. It's unlikely a shopper will choose BOPIS as their fulfillment option if they are unable to see when it will be available for pickup.

Common Challenges in Displaying Delivery Dates on eCommerce Sites



Presenting accurate fulfillment dates may seem like a simple task, but it can pose numerous challenges for companies. From inventory management to shipping logistics, there are several hurdles that must be overcome to ensure that you set the right delivery expectation.

Inventory Management

One of the fundamental challenges in providing accurate fulfillment dates is having real-time inventory visibility across channels, stores, warehouses, and distribution centers. To estimate when the product will be available to the shopper, the system needs to first determine inventory availability, quantity, and the locations with available inventory.

Complexity of Fulfillment Network

Retailers often navigate complex fulfillment networks, with stores evolving into multifunctional fulfillment centers. Beyond facilitating in-store pickups, they now serve as hubs for direct shipments. To lower inventory carrying costs, retailers carry lower stock levels at individual locations and transfer inventory between locations to get the order to the shopper. There may even be more than one hop between sites. For example, between Warehouse - Regional DC – DC before the order is shipped. Since processing and transfer times at locations need to be considered in fulfillment date calculations, a complex fulfillment network makes the task more challenging.



Striking a Balance Between Accuracy and Meeting the Promised Date

The retailer can optimize the shopper's journey by displaying fulfillment and delivery dates - but there needs to be a balance between being as accurate as possible and meeting the promised dates. Typically, estimated dates are displayed on:

A) **PDP (Product Display Page):** Displaying an estimated fulfillment date before the shopper adds an item to cart helps the shopper make the decision to purchase the product.

B) **Cart and Checkout:** Displaying the estimated delivery date at cart and checkout is critical as it is the final view the shopper has before purchase. Any friction here may prevent the shopper from completing the purchase. Displaying accurate delivery dates becomes more complex at this point as it depends on how the retailer prefers to ship the items. The retailer needs to make the decision to display the estimated delivery date per item (if items are to be shipped individually) or display the delivery date across items (if items are being consolidated to be shipped).

Supplier Delays

Companies often rely on suppliers to provide them with the products they sell on their ecommerce platforms, but delays in the supply chain can significantly impact meeting the fulfillment dates promised. Since supplier delays happen due to unforeseen circumstances, they should not be factored in the delivery date calculation. The best the retailer can do is proactively inform the shopper if there is a delay via email or text message.

Shipping Logistics

Once an order is placed, the process of shipping it to the customer involves numerous logistical challenges. Factors such as the shipping carrier's capacity, weather conditions, and geographic location can all affect delivery times. Additionally, you must consider various shipping options, such as standard shipping, expedited shipping, and same-day delivery, each of which comes with its own set of complexities. If there is uncertainty, you could present a delivery range rather than a specific date, but too broad of a range could be futile.

Peak Seasons and High Demand

During peak shopping seasons, such as the holiday season or major sales events like Black Friday, companies experience a surge in orders. Managing fulfillment dates becomes even more challenging during these times, as increased order volumes can lead to delays in processing and shipping orders. This requires carefully planned and allocated resources to meet customer expectations during peak seasons.

Technical Limitations

Operational systems like an order management system play a crucial role in managing fulfillment. However, outdated and inefficient systems can prevent a company from providing accurate fulfillment dates. Integration issues between order processing, inventory management, and ecommerce solutions can lead to discrepancies in fulfillment information being displayed.



Benefits of Presenting Accurate Fulfillment and Delivery Dates

From the company's perspective, providing accurate fulfillment dates is not just a matter of setting and meeting expectations. It's a critical component of building customer trust and loyalty. When done right, it's a win-win for both the customers and the company.



Higher Conversion Rates

By reducing uncertainty and anxiety associated with delivery times, retailers can create a more seamless and enjoyable shopping journey for their customers — ultimately leading to higher conversion rates. A **recent study** found that 64% of consumers are more likely to proceed with their purchase when estimated delivery dates are presented during the shopping journey.

Credibility in the Market

Consistently meeting or exceeding fulfillment expectations is paramount to building trust and credibility with customers. When you deliver on delivery promises and provide accurate fulfillment dates, you demonstrate reliability and commitment to customer satisfaction. This, in turn, fosters loyalty and encourages repeat business, as satisfied customers are more likely to return for future purchases and recommend your business to others.

Knowing the fulfillment dates helps set expectations. Consumers may expect a dress from a fast fashion company to arrive in a few days, but a B2B buyer purchasing production materials may expect the delivery to be several weeks (87 days according to **Deloitte**).

Position Products with Incoming Future Inventory

Presenting fulfillment dates is especially useful for products with future incoming inventory. These could be products with longer lead times like appliances. The shopper is assured of when they can get the product even if it takes a longer time to be fulfilled.



How to Ensure Accuracy in Fulfillment and Delivery Dates

Providing accurate delivery or fulfillment dates is easier said than done. It requires seamless integration between your back office operational systems and the frontend customer experience.

Bring in the Right Technology

Gone are the days when traditional ERPs or back-office systems sufficed. With consumers demanding real-time information and seamless channel-less experiences, companies need a cloud-based, distributed order management system.

This entails a complex matrix of factors: identifying the customer's location, available inventory across fulfillment centers, shipping methods, routing logic, and estimated delivery times. Crucially, these calculations must occur in near real-time with milliseconds mattering in preventing cart abandonment.

The challenge extends beyond cart and checkout to earlier in the shopper journey of individual product pages with fulfillment estimates being increasingly expected across entire product listings and search results. This places immense pressure on operational systems like the OMS to perform flawlessly, as meeting these expectations directly correlates with customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Some of the key capabilities to look for in an OMS include:

- Real-time inventory visibility
- Intelligent and extensible order routing
- Flexible and customizable fulfillment options

Seamlessly Integrate Between the eCommerce Platform and the Order Management System

Seamless integration between your eCommerce platform and OMS is essential for consolidating crucial data frequently and in the right place. This integration facilitates the provision of real-time inventory updates and enables efficient order routing based on customer preferences and inventory locations, along with any specific routing rules in place.

By establishing shared data and services across these systems, such as customer profiles, inventory records, and order information, you create a cohesive operational framework. This interconnectedness streamlines your company's ability to oversee and meet customer demands effectively.

Bring Operations to the Customer Experience

Once you have the integration in place, you need to translate order routing and inventory visibility into a format that the customer can see and interact with. For example:

- Filtering products by store specific stock levels for BOPIS or curbside pick-up orders
- Seeing estimated delivery date in the search results, PLPs, or PDPs based on the customer's location
- Offering multiple fulfillment options, such as ship-to-store, BOPIS, or ship-to-home and provide delivery dates for each one



Conclusion

In today's competitive market, transparency and accuracy in fulfillment dates are paramount for customer satisfaction. Shoppers expect more than just the convenience of online shopping; they demand clarity and reliability throughout their buying journey. Research highlights that customers prioritize certainty over speed, making clear delivery timelines crucial in their decision-making process.

To meet these expectations, businesses must integrate their ecommerce platforms with order management systems. By leveraging advanced commerce technology, you can ensure the accuracy of fulfillment dates, fostering trust and confidence among customers. This approach not only meets but exceeds customer expectations, driving long-term success in the dynamic realm of digital commerce.

About the Author



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She has over 15 years of experience in leading product innovation for enterprise software solutions in the retail industry. Madhulika's previous product experience is in building retail planning solutions at Blue Yonder.
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