



APS Fulfillment, Inc.

# 6 INSIDER SECRETS TO SAVE TIME & MONEY WITH YOUR PRODUCT FULFILLMENT



# The Power of Product Fulfillment

“The traditional retail store is dead! Gone are the days of traveling, parking, browsing, walking and paying cash for goods. Why bother anymore when you can go online from the comfort of your home, point, click, pay and have the items conveniently sent right to your door within a matter of days? It’s just common sense and those who take advantage of this should see their sales grow while others flounder in the dust.”

The above quote was taken from an online marketing expert who has both traditional retail experience and experience with online product fulfillment, and it’s as simple as it gets:

**The power of online shopping is growing to the point that all other forms of traditional shopping may be headed the way of the dinosaur.**

The top-5 products sold online are:

- 1) Clothing
- 2) Jewelry
- 3) Electronics
- 4) Music
- 5) Furniture

As you can see, 4 out of 5 can’t be delivered by simply being downloaded into a customer’s account. They need to be processed, picked, packed and shipped to the customer quickly and as cost-effectively as possible.

Additionally, this growing market expects more than it used to. With better smartphone applications, the emergence of tablets, the competitiveness of the online e-commerce marketplace and the growing expectations of “instant gratification” by the consumer, the old model of mail-order fulfillment is now obsolete.

Two things you can no longer get away with are:

- 1) Allowing 4-6 weeks for shipping. Even if you disclaim this on ordering, customers will click somewhere else to purchase in 48 hours or less. If you can’t fulfill your product in that amount of time, you’re dead.
- 2) Charging hefty shipping and handling prices. Sure, charging a nominal fee or restocking fee on returns is currently tolerated. However, if you can’t at least offer free shipping on big-ticket items or if you have to charge your customer an astronomical shipping fee, you’re going to lose potential customers by the truckload!

So, how does a business like yours ensure that customers get their products fast without charging them hefty shipping fees? The simple answer: *use a product-fulfillment company.*

The benefits of a product-fulfillment company are numerous:

- **Storage:** Having a fulfillment center with a large warehouse will ease the burden of finding a place to store your product.

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1: <http://hk.nielsen.com/documents/Q12010OnlineShoppingTrendsReport.pdf>

- **Staffing:** A fulfillment center employs expert warehouse staff who can efficiently pick your products off the shelves and professionally pack them for shipping, even fragile or high-value items.
- **Data Management:** A fulfillment center can manage your customer list with various data-management tools. Automatic postal sorting can ensure you get a better discount from the USPS than if you did it yourself. Plus, they can analyze your customer database, find out which customers are your best customers and even set up a rewards program or other programs to increase sales.
- **Returns:** A fulfillment center can easily deal with returns, as products come back to the same location. They can be professionally unpacked, refurbished if necessary and restocked.
- **Shipping Discounts:** Because a fulfillment center is dealing with various shipping companies and the postal service on a daily basis, you benefit with volume discounts that are unavailable to you when processing work in-house.
- **Technology and Equipment:** The ability to send personalized communications that can be inserted into your product packaging or including promotional information is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the professional capabilities of a product-fulfillment center.

As you can see, a company that needs to fulfill products or materials for various customers needs the expertise of a professional fulfillment house.

## **Secret #1: In-House or Outsource? The Choice Is Clear**

No matter what business you're in, you're going to need to produce on the fulfillment end. If you don't, people either won't know your business exists or will never receive your product. One of the big decisions, then, is how to approach your fulfillment needs.

Fulfillment is essentially anything you'll be sending to the customer, from ads to the final product. It requires keeping an inventory ready to meet demand and ship out in a timely fashion. For many business owners, fulfillment is a time-consuming, unenjoyably expensive part of the job.

To an entrepreneur—especially one who is working hard on sales and marketing to grow his or her business—fulfillment is often an afterthought. After all, how hard can shipping out orders or mailing ads really be, right? Well, the truth is that it does take time, and it is often a problem area for many small businesses that can really hurt their reputation with customers. When it comes to product fulfillment, the best move, typically, is to outsource.

## **When Outsourcing Makes the Most Sense**

Outsourcing product fulfillment should start as soon as your business is growing to the point where it's becoming increasingly time-consuming to process, pick and ship orders. At this point, your focus has likely switched from growing and running the business to product fulfillment, limiting your ability to attract new customers.



Professional fulfillment centers offer the best way to ensure orders are processed, picked, packed and shipped as efficiently as possible. This is what they specialize in. Fulfillment centers handle this kind of work with the professionalism and accuracy that all businesses strive for. They make sure customers get what they need in a timely fashion, handling the order every step of the way so that businesses can concentrate on what they do best.

Fulfillment centers will process orders directly from your business' online store, and have inventory in stock to pick and pack and ship out in a timely fashion to anywhere in the world. Because they also warehouse your business' inventory, the shipping becomes a seamless process where you have nothing to worry about—except cashing checks. If there's a problem with the order, the product-fulfillment company handles it, once again freeing up your time to deal with important issues, not trying to clean up messes.

As your company grows, you're likely to gain customers from all over the country, and perhaps the world. This is especially true for online businesses, where the main goal is to escape the shackles of the local market and gain exposure on a much wider platform. Trying to handle fulfillment in-house with an online business is difficult, if not downright silly.

The reason why outsourcing fulfillment is practically essential with an online business is because, for the most part, fulfillment companies have a network of distribution centers that can get product to anywhere in the world much more efficiently than a single small business can. For example, if you're operating a business out of a home or a small retail space, where are you supposed to keep your inventory as your company grows? Do you have the space to turn your garage or basement into an organized warehouse that's easy and efficient to navigate? Even if you're only selling one item, you may have a variety of SKUs to monitor. Even a business that only sells white T-shirts will need to have a variety of sizes in stock.

Using a fulfillment center doesn't mean you have to rely on them to warehouse all your SKUs. If you only want them to handle your more popular items, that's all you have to store there. There is no obligation to run your entire operation through a fulfillment facility. If you'd like to keep some inventory of less popular items in your current storage facility, that's just fine. When it comes to partnering with a fulfillment company, you're going to want to keep it to your high-volume items anyway.

## The Time Is Right

If you've been thinking about partnering with a fulfillment center to take some of the burden off of your business, then it's likely the right time to do it. Thinking about it is a clear indication that your company is now handling the kind of volume that requires a reliable third party, which can get involved and pick up the extra work for you. And let's face it: it's extra work you don't want to do.

There are actually a number of issues that arise when a small business elects to handle its product fulfillment in-house. For starters, filling and shipping orders takes a lot of time, regardless of how many you're sending out. It takes away time from important things like marketing and advertising, growing the business, keeping the books straight and all of the other things that you're responsible for. The key to running a successful business is getting the best minds working at what they do best, not picking, packing and shipping orders (unless that's the business, of course!).

Shipping orders involves a lot of running around. Your online store is open 24/7, and customers expect that once they've clicked to authorize the payment, the wheels are in motion on the fulfillment side.

With a fulfillment company, they are. When you do it yourself, this is never the case.

If possible, a small-business owner has the time to deal with picking, packing and shipping once a day... at best. He or she will typically pick orders in the evening and get them ready to ship in the morning (or vice versa). Regardless, it's not the round-the-clock picking, packing and shipping that a fulfillment facility offers.

If a product doesn't get around to shipping, let's say, at the minimum, two days after it's been ordered, it may take an unsatisfactory amount of time for the customer to receive his or her goods. If you're trying to grow a small business, you want to make sure customers are happy and keep coming back.

Statistics also show that a small-business owner is likely to make more mistakes with shipments. This is likely because his or her warehousing situation is unorganized and his or her mind is elsewhere when it comes to picking, packing and shipping. Now you've not only got to deal with an unhappy customer, but also take the time to deal with calls, get the mistaken shipments back and make sure everybody ends up getting what they ordered. When you partner with a fulfillment facility, you are spared these worries. They also handle the customer-service side when it comes to orders.

## **Why the Integrated Approach to Fulfillment Is the Smartest Choice**

When you partner with a fulfillment company, they handle the entire job from start to finish. They receive the order, process it, pick it, pack it, ship it and handle all of the customer-service issues related to the fulfillment. Everything is in one place, so there's no need, on your part, to warehouse inventory, find the best shipper, or deal with anything else. You can rest assured that customers are getting their orders as quickly and fluidly as possible. All you're responsible for is making sure the fulfillment company's distribution centers are stocked with your products.

As your business grows, the fulfillment center will be able to seamlessly grow with you. Because they handle big volume and usually have a number of distribution centers, they've always got room for your needs.

Fulfillment centers also help keep shipping rates down because they have more negotiating power with carriers than a small business does. Because they handle so much volume, they are able to get better rates from carriers that are looking for contracts.

Finally, if you're attracting international customers or orders from major retailers, there are a number of compliance issues that are attached with each. Meeting these requirements on your own can be extremely difficult. A fulfillment center, however, is used to meeting the criteria and can ensure your product is sent to whomever, wherever, without breaking any laws, rules or regulations. We'll take a closer look at this later in this report.

As you can see, the choice between keeping your fulfillment obligations in-house or outsourcing them is fairly simple. Outsourcing fulfillment allows you to stay focused on your strengths while leaving the boring—yet essential—work to somebody else. Here's a brief list of why outsourcing fulfillment is the superior decision:

- Time and energy
- Scalable growth
- Automation from the purchase to the delivery
- Lets you focus on what you do best
- Access to foreign markets
- Retailer compliance
- Faster, cheaper shipping
- Seamless fulfillment (everything is in one place)
- You get an experienced partner to help grow your business

## **Secret #2: How to Spot a Great Fulfillment House**

Much like anything, there are various tiers of fulfillment houses out there. Some of them are better than others, and some have more capabilities, depending on what your needs are. As you look for the best fit for your needs, there are a few things you should take into consideration before you make your final selection.

One of the first things you're going to want to look into is what kind of capabilities the fulfillment house has. If it's determined that it can effectively do what you need it to, then that's a great start.

Before we continue, it's important to realize that fulfillment houses can specialize in all, one or any combination of these three areas: mail fulfillment, literature fulfillment and product fulfillment. Each requires a specific skill set and level of expertise, so you want your choice to be capable in the areas that are the most important to your business. We'll go into more depth about these three categories in a moment.

Before you sign any contracts or make a final decision, due diligence is key. You don't want to realize that the fulfillment house you've selected can't perform come crunch time. By then, it's likely too late, and you'll be wasting your time and money cleaning up the mess. Start by looking at its capabilities. If the operation it is currently running includes lots of similar projects (i.e., direct-mail fulfillment, product fulfillment, printing, etc.), then you can be assured that it's ready to deliver what you need. If not, keep looking.

If the capabilities are there, the next step is to look at what kind of work it's doing. If it's got a particular focus on the industry or market your business is part of, it's even better. That means it will be able to get your mailings done efficiently and in the best possible fashion for your business. Furthermore, it may be able to help grow your business by getting you in touch with other, similar companies. It will also be able to assist you in coming up with design and packaging ideas that work for a particular industry. Finding a fulfillment house with a specific area of expertise can be very beneficial to the continued growth and success of your company.

Next up, you're going to want it to offer you some verifiable facts and figures that prove it's capable of doing what it says it can. Pay attention to volume capabilities, printing equipment, warehousing space, staffing and what the company has been able to accomplish for other clients with similar requirements to yours. If possible, ask for references or try contacting other clients of the fulfillment company to ask them about their experiences.

It's also important to pay attention to the regional network offered by the fulfillment house. Depending on your shipping/ mailing needs, it may be in your best interest to find a fulfillment house with a large regional network to help lower shipping time and cost. The bigger the network, the more ground you can cover and, ultimately, the less you'll pay to get orders and mailings out.

A good fulfillment house will also have new equipment and services that are capable of efficiently producing the work you need done. This can be anything from software to printing equipment to inventory control to education. The newer the equipment and the better educated the staff are, the more efficiently they should be able to perform the tasks you've set out.

Finally, you want to work with people who you trust will get the job done. This gives you peace of mind so that you're not worrying about what you shouldn't be. Finding a trustworthy partner will relieve your stress and give you the confidence that things are being done as well as they can be without you having to monitor them too closely.

## **Fulfillment Types**

Basically, every business requires some type of fulfillment, whether it's mail, literature or product. Mail fulfillment is typically used when a business needs to send out mass mailings in the form of direct mail to a large customer list. This can include magazine inserts, direct-marketing letters, marketing postcards or anything of that nature. For a business mailing 40 pieces, it may not be worthwhile to partner with a fulfillment house, but if that number is in the hundreds or thousands, then a fulfillment house becomes nearly essential.

Literature fulfillment refers to any catalogs, manuals, instruction books, handbooks or printed materials that a business needs to distribute. A fulfillment house can print, publish and ship these items to where they need to be.

Product fulfillment is becoming increasingly popular in business as customers order more from catalogs and over the Internet. Fulfillment houses can receive orders in real time, warehouse, pick, pack and ship all in one swoop.

Depending on your business' needs, you're going to want to find a fulfillment house that can accomplish all your fulfillment goals.

## Mail Fulfillment

Mail-fulfillment businesses are commonly referred to as “lettershops.” These businesses specialize in preparing mass mailings for a number of different types of companies. Whether it’s magazines, advertising, marketing or whatever—if it arrives in an envelope, it likely came from a lettershop. The lettershop not only mails the packages, but it prints and packs each envelope, too. It’s also responsible for posting and mailing the items.

The more you mail, the more you will benefit from enlisting the services of a lettershop.

Mailing takes a lot of time to do in-house, and the truth is that it can get rather expensive. Paying for the man hours to stuff the envelopes, the materials themselves (paper, ink, envelopes, tape, etc.), and postage and delivery means keeping mailings in-house can prove very costly—especially if you’re sending in large volumes.

A good lettershop can relieve this burden and likely lower your costs by offering expertise and insider benefits. Some of the ways a lettershop will lower your costs and make your mailings more efficient are by:

- Offering quality data processing that ensures the addresses on your mailing list are accurate and that they’ve been formatted properly for delivery.
- Removing duplicate addresses and addresses of the deceased. Remember: if you’re mailing to large lists, it’s likely there will be some duplicate addresses and deceased recipients. Mailing these useless extra pieces will only cost you money. A lettershop will clean up your list and make sure everything is up to date.
- Organizing your list in a manner that sees you’ll get the best postage rate possible. The lettershop’s data department will break down and sort the mail so the post office doesn’t have to do it. The mailings are “cleaned” (addresses corrected, wrong addresses and duplicates removed), then pre-sorted into the various postal routes for each regional post office. The closer to the regional post office and the denser the area and mailing size, the cheaper it is.
- Printing the material to be mailed or having you send personalized, pre-printed pieces for mailing. The addresses will be inked on or done with a laser jet, whichever provides for a better rate on postage.
- Folding and inserting mail into the best-sized envelope. They will do this even for personalized mailings.
- Automating the labeling, postage-stamp application and metering of the mail.
- Delivering the mail to the post office, and paying postage on your behalf.
- Pre-printing postage indicia so everything is ready to go as soon as it’s packed.

## Literature Fulfillment

Almost every business produces literature for customers, or anyone outside its office, to view. It can be in the form of a catalog, magazine, newsletter, advertising insert, marketing flyer, instruction manual, sales sheet, handbook or practically anything else. Depending on the size of your business and its network, you may have to get literature to employees or others anywhere in the world. This can be very difficult if you’re relying on the printing and publishing of this material in-house.



Much like mail, producing, packing, mailing and shipping your business' literature can be very time-consuming and costly. Also, many businesses lack the printing capabilities to produce high-quality work at the volume they require.

This kind of work is the specialty of a fulfillment house, which can handle all the printing and shipping needs associated with getting your company's literature into the right hands. Here's a list of what a good literature-fulfillment house can do for you:

- Put together and mail packages (if it's a monthly newsletter, advertisements can be packaged in the same mailing).
- Print, package and ship at a reasonable price (likely much cheaper than what it would cost in-house).
- Lets you avoid the costs of printing too many publications and having to store them. A good letter shop will print the publications *on-demand*, or "as needed." Everything will be on file or can be quickly e-mailed (if it's new material) to get things printed and shipped as quickly as possible.
- Print, package, and process orders much more quickly than most businesses are capable of doing in-house.

## Product Fulfillment

Product fulfillment is becoming a prime topic for many businesses—small and large—as retail sales begin to lose ground to catalog and online shopping. Unless your business has the capability—and budget—to store inventory, process and ship orders on-demand and do all the other work associated with fulfillment, you'll likely need to employ the services of a fulfillment house.

A fulfillment house can offer a one-stop shop for all of your fulfillment needs, allowing you to free your brain and time to focus on growing your business. A good product-fulfillment house will provide the following services to your business:

- Receives product directly from the manufacturer, stores it safely in a warehouse and delivers the product when an order is confirmed.
- Offers the space, software, equipment, expertise and manpower to handle your order processing, warehousing and shipping needs.
- Provides up-to-the-minute, real-time picking, packing, shipping and inventory counts.
- Ships orders the same day they are placed.
- Has the capability to receive orders directly from your business' web site, e-mail, shopping cart, phone or fax without you having to do anything. It handles the entire process of preparing and shipping the order.

- Has a regional network so you can save costs on shipping and get customers their orders in the shortest possible timeframe.
- Will save you money on storage costs (because all the services are integrated, you'll likely end up spending less than you would if you did each step separately. Furthermore, all the supplies associated with shipping are purchased in bulk at a fulfillment house, which can further reduce your final costs).
- Can get better rates on shipping with companies like **UPS** and **FedEx** because it ships in such high volume.

Now that you've seen what a good fulfillment house can do for your business and what to look for when making your decision, we'll turn our attention to the specific equipment and services you should pay attention to.

### **Secret #3: The Equipment a Fulfillment House Must Have to Get the Job Done**

To ensure your needs are handled as efficiently and cost-effectively as possible, you want to make sure you know what kind of technology the fulfillment houses you're looking at are using. The more up-to-date and powerful it is, the more prepared it is to handle heavy workloads with greater speed, efficiency and quality.

The more variety and capabilities the technology and equipment offer, the more they will be able to do for you. Considering getting your projects completed easily, quickly, efficiently and as cost-effectively as possible are likely your priorities, you're going to want to pay attention to a few key features.

It's also important to note that you're going to have to be willing to pay for the quality you want. Higher-resolution printers with more capabilities that cut down on time and increase efficiency may cost a little more to use. That being said, they can lead to savings in other areas. Greater efficiency often leads to less time producing the materials, fewer steps to take to get them out the door and increased output. It can also further reduce shipping costs and mistakes.

## Data Storage & Printing

One of the most important features of a fulfillment house is its ability to safely store the information pertaining to your company. This includes important data like mailing lists, customer-contact information, advertising and marketing content and critical documents (invoices, statements, letterhead, correspondence letters, etc.). Because of the sensitivity of these data, it's essential the fulfillment house you select has a secure network that is capable of protecting your business' most important information. The network and software it uses should also allow you to access the database in order to make any updates or changes you see fit. It should let you add new material and manage the information and content on the database in real time.

You also want to make sure that along with supporting adequate hardware and software, the fulfillment house is adequately staffed with individuals and work stations that will be able to access and fulfill your requests as soon as they are made. You don't want all your information to be sitting there on a network when you need something done. Therefore, staff and workstations are very important in boosting efficiency.

The data-processing department and network should be capable of pre-sorting lists so they are arranged and organized quickly and properly to be grouped together for the best shipping rates. It should also be able to automatically gender-ize names, applying the appropriate "Mr." or "Mrs." to each recipient. It should also be able to standardize addresses so that mail is delivered to the correct addresses. The technology should also ensure that names, cities and addresses are properly capitalized, making each piece look professional. Furthermore, the equipment should prepare pieces properly for foreign mailings.

Regardless of the format your data may take—Zip drives, electronic file transfers, high-quality scans—the equipment used by the fulfillment house should be able to handle it. Remember: its job is to make things easier for you, not to make you re-send information countless times to make sure it's compatible. A good fulfillment house will have the equipment and technology to meet your needs.

## On-Demand Printing

To make the process of on-demand printing as effortless and fluid as possible, you'll want the fulfillment house to set up something called a "digital assets management library." What this does is allow you to go into the network whenever you like and make the materials to be printed available. You can make edits, leave them in the database, or create new pieces altogether. When you're ready to have them printed, all you should have to do is give the instruction. This kind of technology works to further lower your costs by allowing you to maintain and update your own library and prepare content for printing.

The laser-printing capabilities offered should include a variety of sizes and formats so that multiple products can be created and packaged. The printer should also be easy to program to handle personalized mailings or any other need you may have.

Finally, the fulfillment house should have the technology to process orders directly from your web site or order database as they are received.

## Warehousing

Ideally, the product you'll be storing with a fulfillment company is something that fits easily in a warehouse. Standard boxes, which are easily stacked, make for the best, most cost-effective storage. When items are random shapes and sizes and can't be easily stored, that's when higher costs enter the fold.

The fulfillment house's distribution center(s) should appear organized and be easy to navigate, so order pickers and shippers can pick your product and get it ready quickly and efficiently. Automated systems should be in place to print orders on-demand, track inventory and provide accurate storage locations. An unorganized, non-automated warehouse is usually a place where bad things happen, mistakes are made and product gets lost, and your customers, in turn, can be left unhappy. Therefore, you want to select a fulfillment house with an automated, organized warehouse to ensure inventory counts are correct and shipping occurs quickly and accurately.

## Secret #4: Why Pay More?

### The Best Way to Save Money Fulfilling Product

There's no question that your small business will pay more to fulfill orders in-house than through outsourcing. You likely don't do the volume or have the size and scope to negotiate cheaper shipping rates or have the same kind of access to various regions. This is essentially the reason why fulfillment



houses exist.

Now, that being said, it's important to get something straight: outsourcing your fulfillment may not appear cheap at first sight. There are a number of costs that are factored into the various services you'll require from the fulfillment house, so you should be prepared to pay a fair price. Remembering why you need the fulfillment house, however, should make it seem like a worthwhile business expense.

The price you'll pay for a fulfillment house will depend on the services that you require. The costs that will be factored into your bill include: receiving, SKU setup, warehouse space, pallet size, weight, print quality, print size, data storage, postage, shipping, etc. However, it's important to note that the more volume you do, the less you will likely pay per unit.

You'll be paying for this service because you need it. It's a worthwhile expense because it allows you to further grow your business by concentrating your focus and efforts on your strengths as a business owner. There's a good chance you didn't start your own business to spend a substantial amount of time processing orders, managing inventory, shipping orders, paying postage and dealing with customer phone calls when there are errors in their shipments. You also probably didn't anticipate the cost of paying someone to assist you with these tedious tasks. All of these things are quite time-consuming and can greatly detract from your ability to grow and sustain an innovative, healthy business. You've got a specific skill set, product, idea or service that you excel at, so that's where your focus should be. You should be concerned with finding ways to bring your gifts to more people instead of doing product fulfillment. After all, why do you want to spend your valuable time and money on checks you've already cashed?

## **The Unseen Costs of In-House Product Fulfillment**

At first, you may be asking yourself why, if you've been successful at fulfilling your own product demand so far, you would want to pay someone to do it. That's a good question, and there are some pretty good answers, too.

In the beginning, sure, it's unlikely that enlisting the services of a fulfillment house would've made much sense. Unless you were sending out large quantities of direct mail or advertising pieces, you would've had virtually no use for one. It's likely your online business was getting enough traffic through the Web. Once the orders started rolling in, they were likely at such a small volume that filling them was manageable. You likely had some inventory stored somewhere that you could access easily and get orders picked and packed almost as they came in.

However, as the business grew and more orders started coming in, you likely found yourself spending more time filling and shipping them out. Of course, you likely didn't notice how long it was taking and how much it limited your ability to focus on the other areas of the business. Marketing efforts likely dropped off, as did the focus you put on growth and innovation. This may be all well and good for the time being, but at a certain point, it becomes very detrimental to the success of your business. The more stagnant your marketing and growth efforts become, the less likely you are to see continued success.

It's important to realize how many dollars could be at stake by maintaining in-house control of product fulfillment. The lost time we just mentioned is one area where it could be costing you. In addition, the man hours you put into product fulfillment are worth something. Think of what it would cost, per hour, for that extra work that you're doing. Your time isn't free—especially when you're trying to grow a business. It's actually quite the opposite: your time is at a premium.

The inventory also will not store itself, pick itself, pack itself or ship itself. Even if you're not paying for warehouse space and storing your inventory at home, there are still costs involved with home storage. For example, you'll have to purchase all the necessary supplies to ship your product. That means you'll have to buy boxes, labels, tape and paper (for invoices and packing slips), as well as pay for postage and shipment. Depending on the carrier you use, you may be required to rent a label-printing machine and computer to submit pickup requests. It may not sound like a lot, but all these costs add up and can eat up time and profits.

If you're paying someone to staff your warehouse and cover shipping and receiving (at your business), then your costs rise even higher.

## How a Fulfillment House Can Save You Big-Time Money

Partnering with a fulfillment house offers peace of mind and the luxury of being able to concentrate on the more important aspects of your business, while also presenting a great opportunity to save money.

What makes outsourcing product fulfillment so appealing from a cost perspective is its ability to secure optimal postage and shipping prices. As mentioned earlier, because fulfillment houses ship in such large volumes, they are able to get the best deals on postage and from carriers. Because of the sheer number of shipments, there is no way a small business can come close to getting the same rates on postage and shipping. With a fulfillment house, shipping and postage costs per unit are substantially reduced.

You can take advantage of savings in another way, too. A fulfillment house is essentially a one-stop shop for all your order processing and fulfillment needs. Therefore, because there are bulk services, you can get a bulk discount. Once you factor in all the costs you'd incur by handling fulfillment yourself, you'll see how many savings actually exist.

Here's a look at some of the costs that will be factored into your fulfillment costs (will vary based on individual needs/fulfillment houses):

- Warehouse staff
- Time to track and update inventory, pick and process orders (manpower)
- Software and equipment to pick, process and track orders
- Packing supplies
- Postage (regional, national and international)
- Shipping (regional, national and international)
- Receiving
- Warehousing, storage
- Customer service
- Paper, envelopes, ink, printers (mailings)

As you can see, there are a number of services involved that justify the cost of a fulfillment house. Before you decide on a fulfillment house, take a look at the costs of the various services you'll be utilizing to see if they're fair and offer overall savings. For a growing online business, partnering with a fulfillment house presents a smart, efficient and cost-effective opportunity.

## Secret #5: How the Success of Any Business Is Tied to Professional Product Fulfillment

At the end of the day, the successful growth of your business is gauged by its ability to make customers happy. Solid businesses are created by retaining the customers you have, while actively acquiring more. A business that has a hard time holding on to existing customers is usually going to travel a fairly rough path.

In any business, but especially in the world of online businesses, customer service and the ability to deliver is what can make or break your company's success. This is mainly because there is no shortage of online retailers in any industry. For example, take dietary supplements. Searching "buy dietary supplements" on **Google** turns up 122 million results. Therefore, it's quite easy for a customer to use a number of online retailers until they find the one that delivers the best quality at the best price in the shortest amount of time.

A fulfillment house, ultimately, is in the customer-service business. Its job is to ensure your customers get their product as fast as possible, without error. And because of the capabilities that we've discussed in the previous pages, many fulfillment houses are able to accomplish this. When it comes right down to it, when you partner with a fulfillment house, you're entering into a relationship with professionals who specialize in bringing your business' promises to the public.

### Retaining Customers by Outsourcing Fulfillment

To keep customers happy and increase your business' chance of retention, you have to accomplish a number of tasks, including:

- Building a relationship through mailings that keep customers informed. This contact goes a long way toward building credibility.
- Delivering results you've promised in a timely fashion (turnaround time is essential in today's online-business world. There is simply too much competition to fall behind. Furthermore, with all the shipping options available, most customers expect their products to be delivered within a day or two of placing an order).
- Offering high-quality, reliable service in a number of areas (ordering, tracking, customer service to field questions).
- Keeping updated, current customer lists.
- Being accessible.
- Having the best people doing the things they excel at to deliver the best possible product and experience.

Partnering with a fulfillment house allows your business to do all these things well, and it's no secret. They are in the business of doing all of these things to make sure your business operates as efficiently as possible on the fulfillment end, so you can concentrate on running the business. That's why some of the most successful businesses and lucrative industries choose to outsource the majority of their customer fulfillment. Even though they likely have the resources to handle it in-house, they know that fulfillment is best left to the professionals.

## Thriving Industries Using Fulfillment Houses

No matter where you look or shop, there's a pretty good chance the mail you read and the goods you purchase have been delivered by a lettershop or fulfillment house. Huge industries rely on them to build and strengthen relationships with customers by providing the information they need and the products they want. Here are some industries that rely on outsourced product fulfillment to increase exposure and the bottom line:

**Online Retailers:** The online retail world continues to grow, and it is likely to carry the retail world into the future. Without a fulfillment house to store and deliver orders on time and across borders, many online retailers will likely fail to reach their full potential. Regional distribution centers, cheap postage, warehousing and fast turnaround are all essential in keeping an online business' overhead costs down, allowing it to increase profits and provide a high-quality customer experience. Taking advantage of a fulfillment house's network and services is essential for anyone who is serious about taking an online business to the next level.

**Traditional Retailers:** Retailers also rely heavily on the services of fulfillment houses. Retailers use fulfillment houses to handle printing needs, direct marketing, catalogs, brochures, and loyalty cards and to draw up targeted direct-mail campaigns.

**Financial Services:** Financial-services companies need fulfillment houses to make sure clients stay up to date with critical, timely information. Because of the importance of getting breaking information out to customers as quickly and efficiently as possible, businesses in the financial-services industry turn to fulfillment houses to get on-demand printing and mailing jobs without missing a beat or falling behind.

**Health-Care Services:** Companies in health care and health-care services rely on fulfillment houses to deliver new offers, important updates, critical documents and enrollment forms to their millions of clients across the country. This provides a fast way to make high-priority information available to the people who need it most.

**Non-Profits:** A number of non-profit organizations use fulfillment houses to produce high-impact print communications at a low cost. They also come up with ways to find the best methods to distribute their messages and work toward accomplishing positive changes.

These are just some of the industries that utilize the capabilities and advantages of fulfillment houses. Fulfillment houses also assist in coming up with strong ad campaigns by relying on a sound knowledge of what works. They assist in elevating a business' status by producing impactful mailings, quick turnaround and a number of other often-overlooked details. And as you'd expect, they stay out of the limelight, deflecting the success of their work onto your business, while absorbing any negative feedback. At the end of the day, a successful business is dependent on its relationship with a quality fulfillment house.



## **Secret #6: Advanced Product Solutions & Fulfillment, Inc: The Best Fulfillment House for All Your Needs**

When it comes to picking the right fulfillment house, you want to make sure it's capable and experienced to handle all of your needs. It should be able to get what you want done, how you want it, when you want it, and be able to offer quality advice that's based on past performance.

*APS Fulfillment, Inc.* provides the fastest, most flexible and most cost-effective means of delivering your business' communications to the market. It operates with the best technology and offers clients a multitude of services that can be done *on-demand*. The cutting-edge technology used by *APS Fulfillment, Inc.* ensures speed, accuracy and results.

Here's a closer look at the services and solutions provided by *APS Fulfillment, Inc.* and where they excel:

### **Fulfillment**

- Hand-assembly of product packaging/count and insert
- Kit building for health care, product sampling, etc.
- Complicated multi-version packaging of multi-language/location/versions
- Product fulfillment to include vitamin distribution/cosmetic distribution/health-related industries

### **Data Processing**

- NT Network with over 300 gigabytes of storage capacity
- Firstlogic CASS-certified software for address standardization
- Sophisticated data processing and management services
- Secure folder set-up for electronic file transfer via FTP

### **Laser Printing & Personalization**

- Duplex cut-sheet laser printers and booklet maker
- MICR/duplex-laser continuous form printers configured with in-line stacking, cutting and folding
- Color digital printers for full-color envelopes, letterhead and variable in-line data and addressing

### **Ink Jet Addressing**

- UV curable inks that print on coated stocks, plastics and cards
- 6 Ekta-jet: ink-jet addressing machines with synchronized heads
- 2 Videojet in-line tabbers

## **APS Fulfillment, Inc:**

### **South Florida's Newest Product Fulfillment & Direct Mail Company**

We at *APS Fulfillment, Inc.* are ready to tackle your next targeted-marketing project with turnkey, state-of-the-art technology.

The world of e-commerce is growing every year, and while businesses are constantly trying to find a way to increase online sales of their products, the method of distributing those products to customers in a timely and cost-effective manner is key to your success. That's where *APS Fulfillment, Inc.* comes in.

We provide consumer and business-to-business solutions for e-commerce, distributors and manufacturers for less money, less red tape and fewer headaches than if you were to do it in-house.

But product and literature fulfillment is just part of what *APS Fulfillment, Inc.* can offer you. Let us show you how to increase your orders by implementing cross-selling, up-selling, acquisition and other important marketing programs. Our full array of technology produces high-volume perfect-match mailings, personalized direct mail, snap-pack mailers, postcards, triple-tabbed booklets and more.

Choose *APS Fulfillment, Inc.* to be the accurate and cost-effective solution to all of your product-fulfillment and direct-marketing needs.

#### **To get a no-obligation quote:**

call 954-582-7450

e-mail [INFO@APSFULFILLMENT.COM](mailto:INFO@APSFULFILLMENT.COM)

or visit us online at [WWW.APSFULFILLMENT.COM](http://WWW.APSFULFILLMENT.COM)