

Picking Document Design

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At one time or another companies experience problems in order picking productivity and quality, and inventory accuracy. There are a variety of elements that can contribute to these problems. I have found that a frequent cause of problems in picking accuracy and productivity can be the design of the picking document. Often the picking list is not designed for the picker, but to merely present the order data and use one printed document for picking, the packing list, and other purposes. There are probably three general ways in which the document can make it difficult for the picker to do a good job.

The first way to make picking difficult is to include more information on the document than is required. There are only a few items of information that a picker must have on the picking document to accomplish the task. These items include the storage location from which the item is to be picked, the unit-of-measure to be picked (each, case, etc.), the quantity in this unit-of-measure ordered, and a blank space for the picker to enter the quantity actually picked or to verify that the quantity picked was the same as the quantity ordered. In some warehouses the picker may also be asked to enter additional information such as the lot number or production date printed on the merchandise. Yet on many documents we find such a variety of additional data that we could wonder if the design guideline was to create one document with which to operate the entire company – receiving, picking, shipping, delivery and accounting.

The second way to make picking difficult is in the way in which the information on the picking document is presented. The documents often appear to have been designed by someone that has never even seen a picker do the work. Specifically, a picking document should be designed based on how picking is done and the person that will be doing the picking. The first thing to remember is that we reach English from left to right and from top to bottom. Consequently, the required information should be presented on each order line - first the pick location followed by the item number, unit of measure, quantity ordered, a space for entry of the quantity picked, etc. All other spaces or data that need to be on the form should follow after these.

The third way to make picking difficult is the sequence in which the items/SKUs are printed on the document. Often I see the ordered SKUs presented on the picking document in the sequence in which the order was received or entered into

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the order processing system, rather than in the sequence in which the merchandise is to be picked, reflecting the pick path and intentional item placement. I recognize that some companies do not have a computer system with which to automatically sort the customer order into a picking sequence, and yet even without the computer to assist, it is possible to create consistency between the order list of items and the placement of those items in the warehouse. I frequently see pickers walking back and forth across the warehouse, potentially many extra miles every day, being asked to do their work faster, while productivity and throughput could be substantially improved with less effort with a location sequenced pick document.

I recognize that whether you want to change the content of the document, or the document format, or the sequence of order lines on the document, it may take some time and energy to get these changes made. Resistance will come from all the usual places. And, the results from even small changes will amaze you, and your personal skill at managing and improving performance will improve as well.

And when your challenges get larger, let's talk about how to break them down to smaller, manageable projects. You can reach me at coach@warehousecoach.com.