

Optimizing Your Manufacturing Warehouse

5 actionable steps
for smoother,
smarter warehouse
management



Have you ever tried to cut the grass with scissors?

Maybe the thought has crossed your mind, but the answer is likely “no.”

Why? Because cutting each individual blade is inefficient and time consuming, and it would take a toll on your body. Anyone with access to a lawn mower knows that it’s better than manual alternatives and saves you time, pain, and frustration.

Yet many people in the manufacturing industry still use metaphorical scissors (manual processes) to tend to their metaphorical lawns (warehouses) so they work harder, not smarter.



If you’re cutting the grass with scissors and your competitor is using a lawn mower, it doesn’t matter how hard you work – you’ll never keep up.

Your manufacturing business matters

From textiles and electronics to food and beverage production, the manufacturing industry plays a crucial role in the global economy, providing essential items and materials that help shape how the world works.

Even so, manufacturing leaders often grapple with organizational challenges that can get in the way of efficiency and profitability.

Whether managing complex supply chains, maintaining high levels of quality control, addressing workforce shortages, or keeping up with technological advancements, these issues demand smart, strategic responses. Manufacturers are also navigating ongoing supply chain digitization and the integration of connected devices across production and logistics.

The NetSuite enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution is designed to transform manufacturing operations and offers robust tools to streamline processes, enhance visibility, and support growth.

Is your business frustrated by limitations in efficiency and productivity?

Does your business need to:



Find a competitive edge to affirm it's ahead of competitors?



Realize that its problems scale as the business scales?



Increase production, but employees work slower than is optimal?



What happens in an inefficient warehouse?

Whether producing automotive parts, building furniture, or manufacturing metals, a business's success lies in the efficiency of its warehouse.

Messy, slow, or inefficient operations can lead to wasted time, frustrated employees, and increased hiring aimed at solving symptomatic issues without ever addressing the root cause of complications.

Even more, customers end up disappointed because a poorly laid-out warehouse causes order fulfillment issues and significant backlogs.

Is there hope for disorganized manufacturers?

The good news is it is never too late to start thinking strategically, increase efficiency, and improve operations.

Following are five steps manufacturers can take to optimize their warehouses, create more efficiency, and help boost margins to transform their manufacturing processes into a well-oiled machine.



Wasted time

Frustrated employees

Unnecessary hiring

Disappointed customers

1 Pay attention to where employees go most often

The first step in warehouse management is to observe what is already happening. More specifically, warehouse managers should pay close attention to which bins and stations employees frequent most often.

Scenario

A warehouse's employees tally up the daily orders and realize they accessed Bin A, Bin B, and Bin C the following number of times:

- Bin A: 175 times**
- Bin B: 130 times**
- Bin C: 240 times**

These three bins are highly frequented, but they are in entirely different sections of the warehouse, far away from each other. One bin is in the raw materials storage area, another in the components storage section, and the last is in the assembly line area.

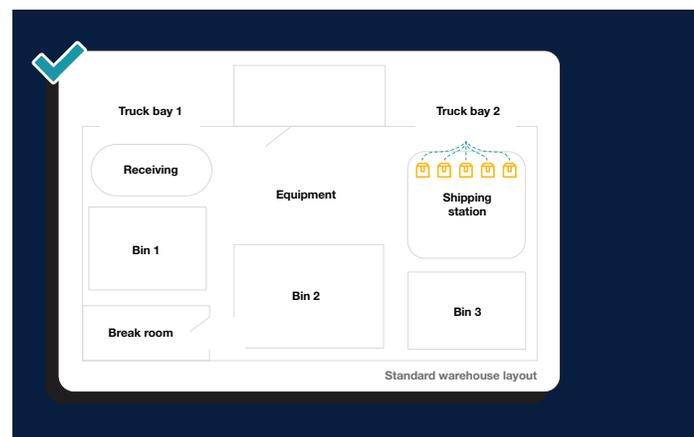
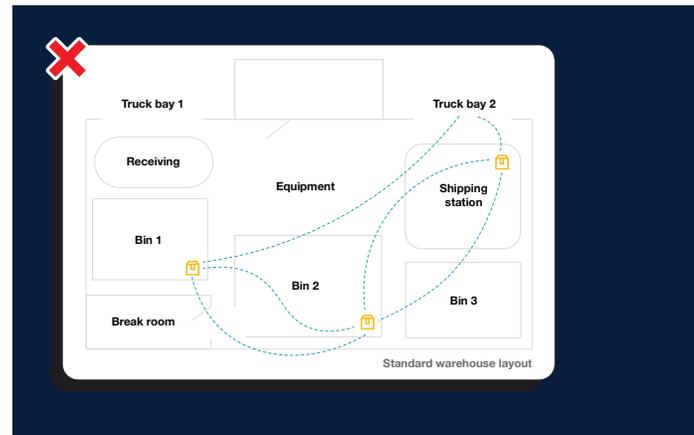
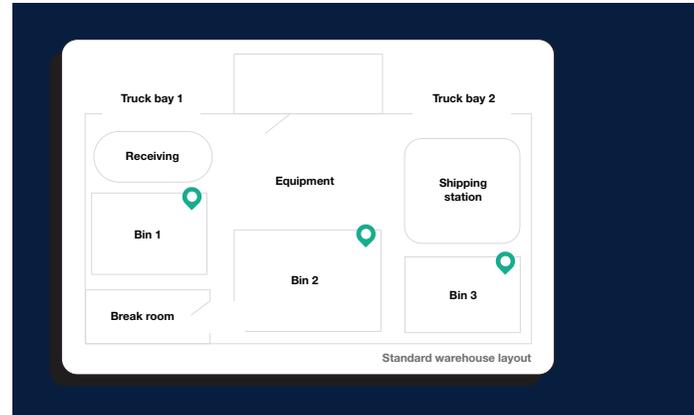
With a bird's eye view of employees' movements and a new perspective on which areas get the most foot traffic, warehouse managers can track downtime spent getting from one bin to the next.

The solution

Identify your most frequented bins and place them as close to the shipping station as possible.

Redesigning the path employees take each day is a huge opportunity to optimize.

Imagine if such reorganization saved employees two trips across the warehouse on every order. How much more productive could the company be?



2 Make it easier to pick multiple orders simultaneously

In any busy manufacturing warehouse, time and efficiency are critical.

By adopting a smarter approach to picking orders, companies can achieve faster delivery times and shave invaluable time off the production process.

A rethinking of picking strategies:

Option 1: Zone-based picking

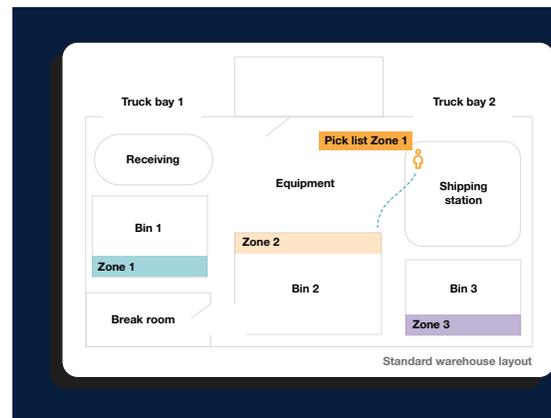
Organize pick lists so that all items within the same zone are grouped together. This method reduces the time spent traveling between picks, allowing employees to handle multiple orders in one go. Imagine the boost in productivity when one employee can take on several zone-specific lists at once instead of dispersing them among multiple pickers.

Option 2: Order size strategy

Break down pick lists by order size. Create separate piles for orders with one to two items, three to 10 items, and more than 10 items. This tactic can lead to more streamlined picking processes and can be particularly effective during peak times or for large batches of similar orders.

Option 3: Line-based picking

Categorize and prioritize pick lists based on the number of pick lines. This strategy can help manage complex orders more efficiently and affirm that larger orders do not bottleneck the overall workflow.



The solution

Categorize orders based on sizes, warehouse zones, or pick lines, and establish clear guidelines for employees on when and how to optimize order picking. By implementing these tailored strategies, manufacturers can maximize the output of their existing workforce and save thousands of steps per day.

3 Implement clear guidelines for using forklifts, dollies, and totes

Efficient material handling is critical in a manufacturing warehouse, and the right tools can dramatically reduce strain and increase productivity on the production floor.

Establishing clear rules for when to use a forklift, dolly, or tote can make a significant difference.

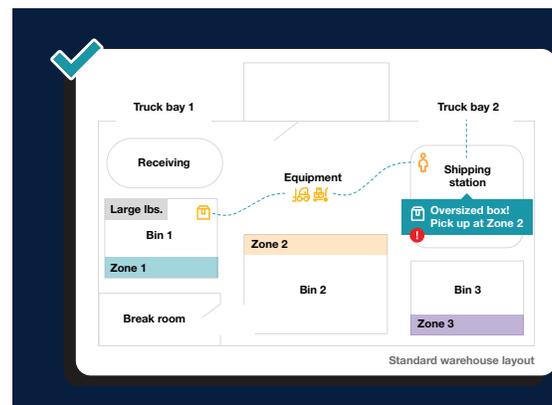
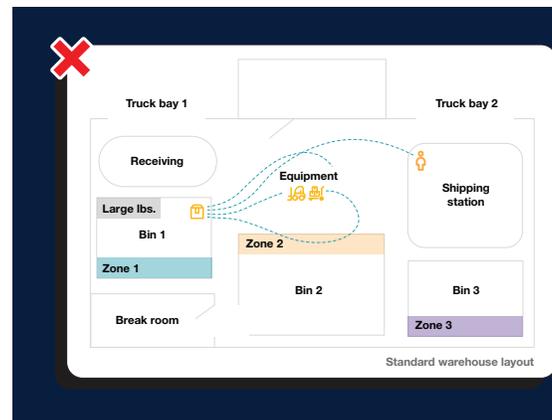
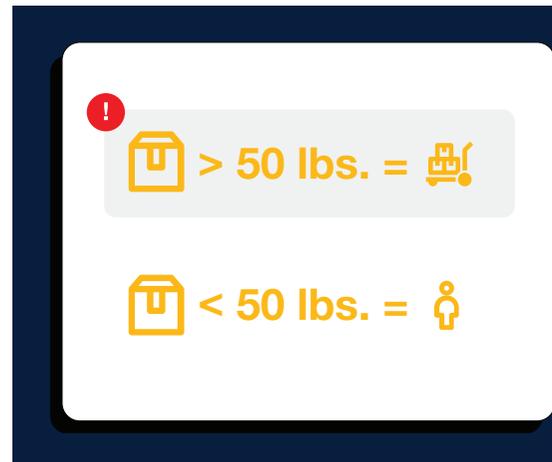
Assess the load

Any item over 50 pounds should automatically warrant the use of a dolly, which can speed up the transportation process and prevent physical strain.

For instance, consider Jeff, a dedicated employee who insists on carrying a 60-pound order by himself. While commendable, using a dolly could reduce his transit time from 45 minutes to just 10, improving efficiency and safeguarding his health.

Strategic placement of equipment

Tools such as dollies should be readily accessible, ideally positioned next to critical stations such as the printing and shipping areas. This setup minimizes unnecessary walking and affirms that everything needed for an efficient workflow is within easy reach.





Tailor equipment to task

For heavier or bulkier items, such as an engine, the use of a forklift might be more appropriate. Such equipment can handle the weight and size efficiently, enabling tasks that would otherwise take considerable effort and time to complete.

Printer routing for heavy orders

Using a system such as a NetSuite solution allows manufacturers to automate printer routing so that orders requiring heavy lifting are sent to stations equipped with the necessary handling tools, further optimizing workflow.

Optimized personnel assignment

Not every order requires heavy machinery. For lighter and smaller packages, assigning the right personnel who can handle manual lifting quickly without equipment can save time and resources.

The solution

By setting explicit criteria for equipment use based on the weight and size of orders, companies can make sure that the right tools are used at the right time. This optimization can boost productivity and enhance workforce safety and satisfaction.

4 Monitor the shelf accessibility of warehouse items

When employees grab commonly used items, do they have to get them from a hard-to-reach shelf?

Efficient warehouse management in a manufacturing setting requires that frequently used items are easily accessible to minimize time and effort during the picking process. Storing these items at an optimal grabbing level – from knee to shoulder height – can significantly speed up operations and reduce physical strain on employees.

Optimize placement of common items

Position frequently used items within arm's reach. This strategic placement allows pickers to quickly and safely access the products they need most often without unnecessary stretching or bending.

Implement ergonomic storage solutions

Arrange racks and shelves to accommodate the natural human range of motion, preventing injuries and reducing worker frustration. Ergonomically designed storage areas affirm that employees can perform their tasks more efficiently and comfortably. Many facilities now use AI-assisted picking robots and exoskeleton support gear to further reduce physical strain and improve accuracy.

Use smart replenishment practices

Use automated systems to track inventory levels and trigger replenishment. For example, if a picker arrives at a bin only to find it empty, having a system in place to automatically lower a full pallet from a higher shelf can save considerable time. This arrangement can streamline the workflow and prevent the repetitive and time-consuming task of manually retrieving items.

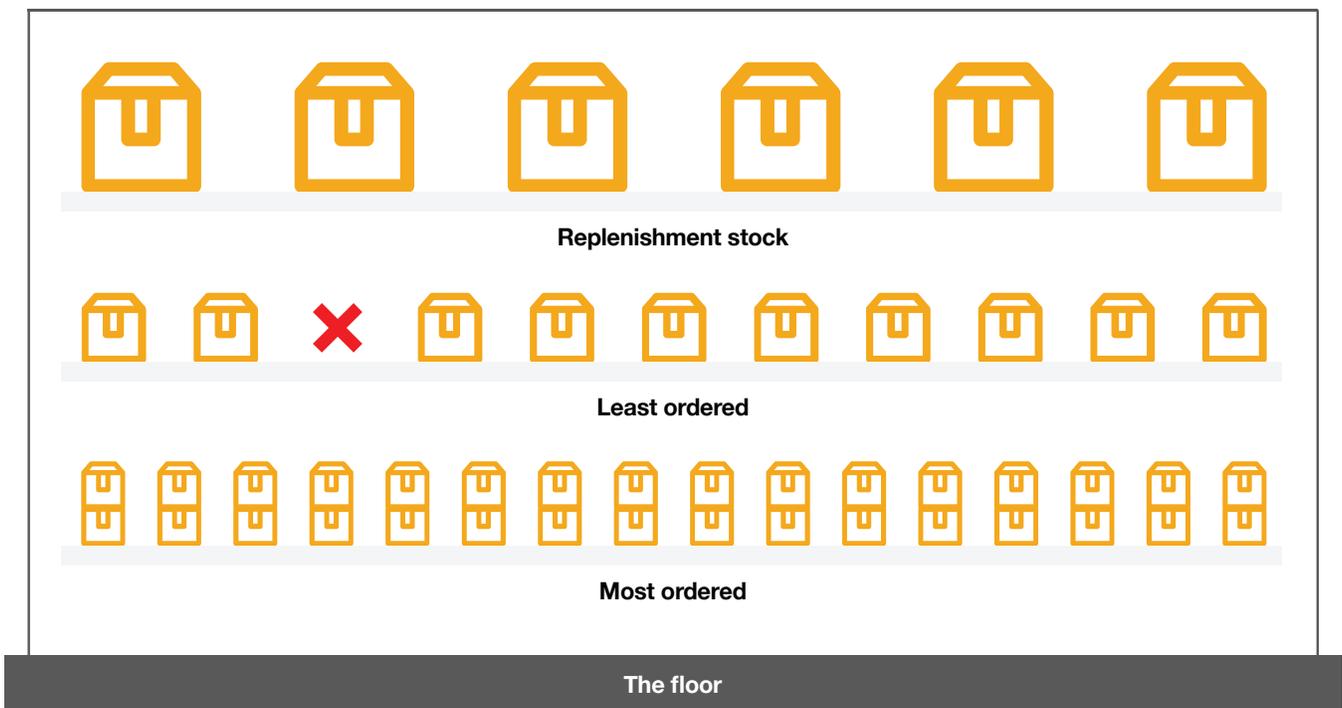


Improve accessibility

Consider a scenario in which pickers reach a bin location and the necessary items are not at floor level. They might waste time looking for a ladder or forklift to access a pallet stored high up. However, with an effective replenishment strategy, these items would already be moved to a more accessible location, significantly reducing downtime and improving overall efficiency.

The solution

By keeping common items stored within easy reach and implementing automated replenishment systems, warehouses can optimize the speed and ergonomics of their operations. This type of improvement can enhance day-to-day efficiency and contribute to a safer and more productive work environment.



5 Automate processes with technology

Transitioning to a more digital, automated manufacturing warehouse is a long-term goal that can offer substantial returns. By equipping employees with mobile apps instead of relying on traditional paper methods, companies can eliminate the risk of lost paperwork and reduce the need for redundant tasks.

Streamline processes with mobile apps

Imagine a warehouse in which every employee has a mobile app that can scan packages directly. This integration means that picking and packing can be consolidated into a single step, removing the need to double-check and drastically cutting down processing times.

Consider voice-picking technology

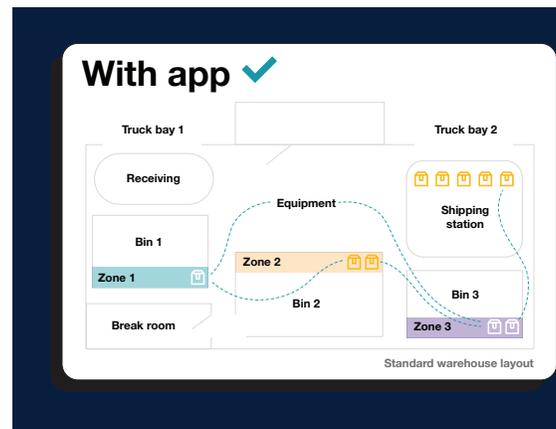
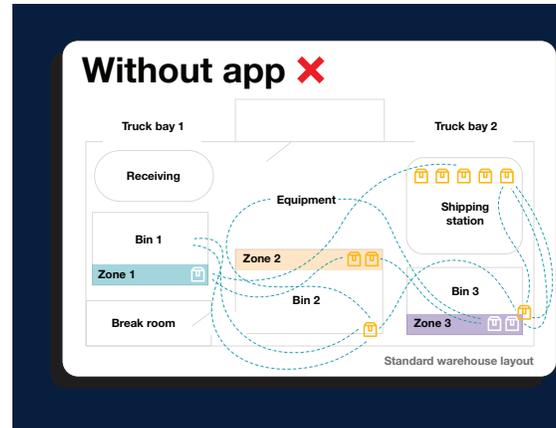
Adopting voice-picking technology with which workers can verbally confirm their picks using a headset, can further enhance efficiency. This method allows for hands-free operation and can speed up the picking process and reduce errors.

Enhance visibility and efficiency

With the right warehouse management system, companies gain precise knowledge about their inventory – not just the quantity but the exact location of each item. This level of visibility improves operational efficiency and supports real-time updates, even allowing for direct sales from company websites, with inventory updating in real time.

Rely on NetSuite ERP

NetSuite ERP is specifically designed to help parts distribution companies fully capitalize on these advancements within a matter of months to transform operations and set a new standard in warehouse management.



The solution

Investing in advanced warehouse management technologies can help streamline operations and provide a competitive edge. By embracing tailored solutions such as NetSuite ERP, manufacturers can enhance productivity, improve accuracy, and boost profitability.

Where can you go from here?

So now what?

You've gained insights into optimizing your manufacturing warehouse operations – some of which you can apply immediately to see improvements.

However, it's also clear that you'll need a robust warehouse management system like NetSuite ERP to fully benefit from more sophisticated strategies.

As a manufacturing leader, you have two primary paths forward:

Path 1: The DIY approach

You could choose to implement these steps on your own. While this might seem appealing, it can quickly become complicated and overwhelming. Many see the potential results as enticing but find the actual implementation challenging without specialist help.

Path 2: The specialist-led, structured approach

Alternatively, you don't have to navigate the complexities alone. By working with NetSuite specialists, you can affirm that your management warehouse system is implemented efficiently and effectively and all features are running smoothly. This path offers a straightforward way to revolutionize your operations without the stress of doing it all yourself.

Taking action

The choice is yours, but the journey to a more efficient, profitable warehouse doesn't have to be walked alone.

Embrace the opportunity to transform your operations with the support of seasoned specialists. Let's make your warehouse smarter together.

Crowe manufacturing: Made for the makers

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We love solving problems

We obsess over the problem – no matter the complexity – and work hard to find the right solution.

We collaborate closely with your team

We work across your team and service providers to help workflow improve and see that your technology accomplishes your goals.

We get things done

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Let's make stuff happen



Alejandro Alvarez
Principal, Consulting
+1 346 308 8507
alejandro.alvarez@crowe.com



Grant Ludema
Principal, Consulting
+1 312 899 1510
grant.ludema@crowe.com

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