

Q4 Operations Readiness Checklist

Q4 represents 38% of annual volume but causes 46% of operational failures for beverage distributors. Use this checklist to identify gaps, eliminate bottlenecks, and protect margin during your busiest quarter.



Inventory Preparedness

Goal: Ensure you have the right products in the right warehouses before demand spikes.

01

Analyze Historical Q4 Velocity

Action: Pull depletion data from last 3 Q4s. Identify top 50 SKUs by volume and rank by case equivalents sold per week.

03

Audit Supplier Lead Times

Action: Contact top 20 suppliers to confirm Q4 production schedules and delivery windows. Document any potential delays.

02

Review Safety Stock Levels

Action: Set minimum stock levels at 2x average weekly velocity for A-tier SKUs. Verify coverage across all warehouse locations.

04

Map Product Allocation

Action: Position fast-moving products closer to high-demand territories. Balance inventory distribution to minimize inter-warehouse transfers.

 **Red Flag:** If you can't answer "Where is SKU X right now across all warehouses?" in under 30 seconds, your inventory visibility isn't ready for Q4.



Demand Forecasting & Planning

Goal: Predict volume spikes with enough accuracy to avoid both stock-outs and excess inventory carrying costs.

Complete These Actions

Build SKU-level forecasts: Use 3-year historical data adjusted for market trends and promotional calendars

Factor in promotional lifts: Coordinate with sales team on planned discounts, displays, and seasonal programs

Identify high-risk products: Flag items with volatile demand patterns or limited supplier capacity

Set reorder triggers: Establish automated alerts when inventory drops below safety stock thresholds

Create contingency plans: Document backup suppliers and alternative products for top 20 SKUs



Forecasting built on actual depletion patterns cuts stock-outs by 85% and eliminates emergency freight costs that kill margin.

 **Red Flag:** If your forecast is based only on "last year plus 10%," you're guessing, not planning. Granular SKU-level analysis is essential.



Operational Capacity Assessment

Goal: Verify your warehouse, logistics, and labor resources can handle 40-60% volume increases without breaking.

Warehouse Capacity

Action: Calculate current utilization percentage. If above 85%, identify overflow storage options or consolidate slow-moving inventory.

- Audit racking and floor space
- Test loading dock throughput
- Verify equipment functionality

Transportation Resources

Action: Confirm vehicle availability and driver schedules. Secure backup carriers for overflow demand.

- Review truck maintenance schedules
- Negotiate spot rates with carriers
- Plan for seasonal route expansion

Labor Planning

Action: Model staffing needs for 150% of normal volume. Begin recruiting temporary workers now.

- Calculate picker productivity rates
- Schedule overtime windows
- Train backup staff on critical tasks

 **Red Flag:** If you're planning to "figure out staffing when volume hits," you're already too late. Seasonal workers need 2-3 weeks of ramp-up time.



Technology & Systems Readiness

Goal: Ensure your tech stack can process higher order volumes without crashes, errors, or manual workarounds that kill efficiency.

Critical System Checks

Test order processing throughput: Run stress tests at 2x normal volume to identify bottlenecks

Verify inventory sync speed: Confirm real-time updates across all warehouse management systems

Audit mobile tools: Ensure field teams have reliable apps for order-taking and route navigation

Review reporting dashboards: Validate that executives can monitor KPIs in real-time during peak season

Document IT support protocols: Establish escalation paths for system issues during high-volume periods

46%

Operational Failures

Percentage of Q4 issues caused
by inadequate systems and
manual processes

40%

Overtime Reduction

Cost savings achieved by
distributors using automated
route optimization

 **Red Flag:** If your team still relies on spreadsheets for route planning or inventory tracking, you'll drown in Q4 volume. Legacy systems can't scale.



Customer Communication Strategy

Goal: Set clear expectations with customers about ordering deadlines, delivery windows, and potential constraints during peak season.



Publish Ordering Deadlines

Notify customers of cutoff dates for guaranteed Q4 delivery. Build buffer time for unexpected delays.



Communicate Delivery Changes

Inform customers of modified delivery windows or consolidated routes to maximize efficiency.



Create Escalation Paths

Establish dedicated support channels for time-sensitive customer issues during peak periods.

Proactive communication prevents 70% of customer complaints during high-volume periods. Send weekly updates on inventory availability and delivery capacity to your top 100 accounts. Create FAQ documents addressing common Q4 questions about minimums, lead times, and substitution policies.

 **Red Flag:** If customers are still discovering delivery delays through missed orders rather than advance notice, your communication strategy needs immediate attention.



Financial Risk Management

Goal: Protect margin during Q4 while managing the cash flow impacts of increased inventory and operational costs.

Financial Safeguards

Review pricing strategy: Analyze margin by SKU and customer segment to identify erosion risks

Model cash flow scenarios: Project working capital needs for 60-day inventory buildup

Negotiate payment terms: Secure extended thresholds for Q4 discount programs

Monitor overtime costs: Track labor expenses weekly against budget to prevent overruns

38%

Annual Revenue

Q4 represents over one-third of yearly sales volume for most beverage distributors

15%

Margin Pressure

Average margin decline during peak season due to expedited freight and overtime costs

 **Red Flag:** If you haven't modeled the P&L impact of 50% volume growth with corresponding cost increases, you may win Q4 revenue but lose on profitability.



Quality Control & Compliance

Goal: Maintain product quality and regulatory compliance standards even when operating at maximum capacity with temporary staff.

01

Audit Safety Protocols

Review OSHA compliance for warehouse operations. Conduct refresher training for all team members on proper lifting techniques and equipment operation.

03

Update Quality Checkpoints

Implement random inspection protocols for outbound orders. Set acceptance criteria for damaged goods and establish return procedures.

02

Verify Product Handling Standards

Document temperature control requirements for refrigerated products. Ensure all facilities maintain cold chain integrity during high-volume periods.

04

Prepare Compliance Documentation

Organize licenses, permits, and insurance certificates. Verify coverage limits are adequate for increased inventory values and operational activity.

 **Red Flag:** If temporary workers aren't receiving the same safety and quality training as full-time staff, you're creating liability exposure and customer satisfaction risks.



How Ready Are You?

Count your checked boxes across all sections to assess your Q4 preparedness level:

✓ 25-30 boxes checked

You're ready. Execute your plan and adjust as needed. Continue daily monitoring of key metrics and maintain communication with your team.

✓ 18-24 boxes checked

You're close, but gaps exist. Prioritize items in Sections 1-2 (Inventory and Demand Forecasting) immediately. These are your highest-risk areas.

✓ 10-17 boxes checked

You're at risk. Focus on inventory preparedness and operational capacity this week. Consider postponing non-critical initiatives to free up resources.

✓ Under 10 boxes checked

You're not ready for Q4. Consider outsourcing logistics functions or delaying promotional activities until systems and processes are stabilized.



Need Help Automating These Workflows?

Most distributors using manual processes or legacy systems can't execute this checklist without adding significant headcount or overtime.

Ohanafy helps beverage distributors automate:

- ✓ Real-time inventory visibility across all warehouses
- ✓ AI-powered demand forecasting for peak season
- ✓ Automated route optimization that scales with volume
- ✓ Mobile-first tools that keep field teams connected

Result: Distributors reduce Q4 stock-outs by 85%+, cut overtime costs by 40%+, and improve margin during their busiest quarter.

See How Ohanafy Works

