

Peak Season Preparation to Streamline and Scale with Speed



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The peak season is a competitive race that challenges many businesses' operations.

This season, there's added pressure for wholesalers and online retailers alike. The D2C (direct to consumer) channel is intensifying as brands uncover new ways to reach customers. In 2020, for example, the US experienced **46% D2C growth** which made up 14% of total retail eCommerce sales. And in just ten years, Nike's D2C model has grown from contributing **13.5% to 33.1%**, nearly a third of its total revenue.

Overall demand is also growing. The Australian eCommerce market is now the eleventh largest in the world and seeing **15.5% year-on-year growth**. On top of lingering supply chain issues, this may lead to more challenges ahead.



46%

D2C growth in 2020

Source: eMarketer 2021 [report](#).



15.5%

YoY eCommerce growth

Source: International Trade Administration
[Market Intelligence Report](#).

The lead-up to peak season always puts distributors and online retailers into overdrive, and this year will be no exception. With mounting pressure from D2C brands, continued supply chain disruption, and increasing demand, those who aren't prepared could end up deflated half-way through the race.

However, the following peak season preparation ideas will help place you in pole position for the buzz of activity ahead.

Scaling your seasonal resources

Seasonal resourcing is a necessity for wholesalers, distributors and retailers. More resources help to scale, but they can also be like a chicane on the race track, slowing things down at pivotal points.

When bringing on more resources, note the successes and challenges from the previous years' temporary staff hiring. Did you see increased picking error rates, for example? Could you reduce these rates by hiring more experienced staff or investing more in training and management? By understanding the improvements needed from the previous year, you can identify more effective ways to scale while minimising potential problems.

Another way to scale quickly is to equip resources with intuitive technology. Far too often, temporary staff are handed clunky, outdated devices that come with a steep learning curve.

The more familiar the technology, the faster people will pick it up. Cloud-based warehousing and retail solutions, for example, now have intuitive user interfaces and are accessible from mobile and tablet devices.

Systems with role-based access and logical process flows also help your staff see only the information they need and quickly understand the next steps to take.



Demand forecasting and scenario planning

During the lead-up to peak season, optimising stock based on trends and changes is essential. Over ordering can result in price reductions and post-season sales to run out excess inventory. Conversely, under ordering can leave customers waiting until after peak season to receive stock. Demand forecasting, however, can maintain the balance right.

By using historical data, trends and patterns can be uncovered and used to predict future demand fluctuations. This data helps identify the commitments needed for different product lines. It's crucial to take note of these variations and adjust to keep inventory at optimal levels.

"In Victoria, Australia, the peak season shifted in 2020. **36%** of the year's online retail purchases happened between July to October due to lockdowns."

Source: Australia Post [eCommerce Industry Report 2021](#).

Also, take note of short-term trends, particularly where lockdowns or eased restrictions may be impacting the usual demand. For example, in Victoria, Australia, the peak season shifted in 2020.

36% of the year's online retail purchases happened between July to October due to lockdowns. eCommerce orders for the state actually declined in November and December. It's a stark reminder that anything can happen – and sometimes does. While it's essential to look at yearly trends, it's also beneficial to consider demand and scenario planning.

Demand planning uses forecast data and additional data like distribution, inventory location, supply plans, and more to turn forecasts into action plans.

Cloud ERP systems like **NetSuite** bring robust demand planning functionality. Specific parameters can be set, right down to item level, with several planning methods available such as seasonal average, moving average, and sales forecast. Additionally, automated notifications can be sent to the relevant staff to ensure purchase orders and transfer orders are executed on time.

Take the lead and help everyone win the race



When the busy period for your business is coming, it's sure to be just as busy for customers. Whether you're a wholesaler, manufacturer, or online retailer, taking the lead can help you and your customers stay on track.

Use demand forecasting and order history data to report on which customers increase product line orders at which times. Then, start reaching out.

With a CRM (customer relationship management) system that's integrated with your sales and inventory systems, it's easy to run reports on whom to target. You can then build task and action lists, automate emails and follow-up reminders, and a whole lot more.

CRM manages your contacts but also tracks and manages communications with customers. It gives you a complete history of conversations through all touchpoints – from customer service to sales and account management.

Segmentation also plays a critical role in making communications easier. For example, segmenting contacts by those who order over certain dollar amounts can help your sales teams proactively target high-value customers.

By reporting, segmenting, and automating activity, you can take the lead and see more customer orders coming in ahead of the peak season race.



Great expectations call for proactive communication

Delayed shipping was a recurring theme in 2020. Supply chain issues, warehouse social distancing restrictions, and various other issues created setbacks around the globe. These factors created some irritation for those at the end of the supply chain. As revealed in The Canberra Times, Australia Post received a 70 per cent increase in delivery complaints in 2020, with **30 per cent** of those related to delays in delivery. Of course, some delays are unforeseeable and unavoidable. You can, however, avert unnecessary frustration from your customers with proactive communication.



Manually checking and updating every customer's order status would be an impossible task for most companies. Thankfully, we're in the age of automation.

Cloud-based ERP systems like NetSuite can **integrate with shipping providers** such as Australia Post. Tracking numbers can be automatically tied to fulfilment records, orders, and invoices to create end-to-end visibility of shipping and delivery. Customer notifications can also be set to trigger as order updates happen, in real-time, ensuring you're always a step ahead.

It's also vital to update customers with shipping cut-off times, particularly as the peak season draws closer. Email and SMS are effective ways to communicate and set expectations with customers. These notifications can also be automated using a cloud ERP system with **email campaign management** and **SMS integration**.

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Source: [The Canberra Times](#).

Automate for peak performance

Many growing businesses struggle with how to scale quickly. When you're ramping up operations for peak season, the issue can quickly compound. The amount of time your company spends on low-value, manual tasks can hamper its ability to focus on strategic, revenue-generating initiatives.

When bringing temporary resources on board, automated processes can reduce the learning curve and training required. It also builds consistency into processes that minimises risk of human error.



The real value of [cloud ERP](#) systems is their ability to automate repetitive tasks throughout supply chain, finance, sales and marketing, and more. You can set minimum and maximum reorder points, for example, to ensure stock stays at optimal levels. Support functions such as case management, issue tracking, warranty registration and repair can also be automated.

The list goes on with countless other ways to do more with fewer resources, reduce errors and manual workload, and build better process consistency. Read more about how a NetSuite ERP system can [automate tasks](#) across the business.

"When bringing temporary resources on board, [automated processes](#) can reduce the learning curve and training needed. It also builds consistency into processes that minimises risk of human error."



Use technology to gain a competitive advantage

Systems can be the main limitation for many companies wanting to improve operations. It's common to add single-use applications to the mix over time. Often, these systems don't talk to each other. They lead to disjointed processes and can create silos throughout the business. For example, sales follow one process, finance follows another, and so on. Internal communications can quickly break down without visibility or understanding of what's happening across the business. Process complexity also puts the breaks on when you need to be scaling operations quickly.

ERP software is one type of business technology that is helping businesses to:

- Scale operations rapidly with an intuitive user interface and process consistency at its core
- More accurately predict stock demand with forecasting and planning functionality
- Build proactive sales processes with in-built CRM
- Enable better communications with shipment tracking integration and automated customer notifications
- Operate in peak performance with reduced errors, automation of manual tasks, and robust process consistency

What is an ERP system?

ERP software (Enterprise Resource Planning) isn't exactly a memorable acronym. The outcomes it creates, however, aren't easily forgotten. ERP is essentially business management software that brings all core operations into a central platform. This centralisation brings real-time transparency across all business operations, leading to faster, more accurate decision-making.

A cloud ERP system will also enable rapid scalability, make your entire workforce mobile, and introduce advanced automation to operate more profitably.

How does ERP work?

ERP provides one back-end platform that brings together all core business functions. A single application manages inventory, CRM, sales and marketing, project management, HR, and more. Cloud ERP platforms can also connect seamlessly via API to any external system while still building the one source of truth for all critical business data. See our [90-second explainer video](#) about ERP systems for more information.

Start your engines

Start your engines for a competitive peak season ahead. Take note of the successes and challenges from the previous years' temporary resource hiring. Then, identify improvements needed from the previous year and build better processes that support fast scaling.

Use historical data, trends and patterns to optimise stock. Get inventory levels right before the rush to minimise stock-outs and ensure you're not left with items to put on sale after the busy period.

Leverage your forecasting and historical data to identify customers to have early ordering conversations with. Use action lists to stay on track and take a proactive approach in reaching out.

Manage customer expectations with improved communications. Let them know shipping cut-off times as the peak season draws closer and keep them up-to-date with changes.

Finally, look at reducing the learning curve for temporary resources and build consistency into processes to minimise the errors and get everything running smoothly.

With the right processes and systems in place, you'll be able to streamline operations and scale with speed.

To learn more about how ERP technology can help you deliver better results this peak season, talk to an [ERP expert](#) now.

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