



HOW-TO GUIDE

5 steps for choosing the right warehouse management system for automation integration

Warehouse Management

Worldwide e-commerce sales have been steadily increasing for quite some time but they skyrocketed to new levels in 2020 due to global lockdowns and in-person shopping restrictions to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Now that more and more consumers see online shopping as their primary purchasing point, [Forbes](#) reports that global e-commerce sales totals are expected to top \$4.2T USD in 2021 alone.

Increasingly companies are looking to permanently adopt new fulfillment models such as direct ship, pick-up in store, and curbside pick-up, new inventory management strategies are needed. As a result, the need for integration between automation and warehouse management systems has become more prevalent than ever before. Organizations wanting to move forward down this path will need to understand the best practices for integrating warehouse management and automation systems.

As business models continue to shift, organizations will start exploring other executional areas where they integrate automation. Developing a detailed automation strategy that's supported and scaled by a WMS will be a key factor to driving operational success.

Ensuring best practices for WMS integration to automation systems.

1. Possess a strong knowledge of WMS functionality requirements

This is critical for organizations that serve a wide variety of customers. Each customer and product SKU will have different requirements, systems, workflows, and associated costs. When you can see the bigger picture clearly and review each of the unique supply chain execution processes in detail in order to identify areas for improvement and innovation, you can then be best positioned to determine system requirements. Fuzzy, vague requirements are the number one reason implementations go wrong or fail.

2. Maintain a clear picture of your organization's automation strategy

Many companies have not developed, documented, or communicated their automation strategy to the people who are charged with implementing it. Since certain automated systems require a longer runway and tighter integration, strategically aligning operating resources with your workforce makes it easier to execute on the processes and activities that keep your company competitive and productive. A strategically aligned organization with performance metrics that are aligned to the strategy is more likely to have a motivated workforce that will work efficiently and productively to achieve desired results. According to a recent report, the warehouse automation market is expected to hit over \$30B USD by 2026 as more companies look to enhance their fulfillment operations.¹

3. Conduct secondary market research to ensure your WMS partner possesses a tier-1 or complete WMS capabilities eco-system

Warehouse management systems and automation have matured over the years and are increasingly being delivered as a set of industry-specific tools and capabilities. Providers with years of experience in certain industries are more likely to offer comprehensive applications to support individualized business needs. Take advantage of that experience. Investing time in a review of the functionality, underlying platform technology, future roadmaps, and industry experience offered by WMS providers will create a base understanding of how technology can help build a competitive advantage and world-class operations. The more comprehensive footprint the solution provider has, the better their technology will fit your requirements and ensure continuous “up-to-date” functionality.

4. Identify key personnel from the WMS provider, internal stakeholders, and automation vendors to complete the implementation process.

This is not a part-time assignment. Subject matter experts, process owners, management, operators, and other participants can be hired on a part-time basis as required by project managers. The project itself, along with documentation and communication with the steering committee throughout the implementation process, is a robust fulltime assignment.

5. Map post-implementation findings to identify necessary adjustments

Building off previously mentioned guidance, it's also important to match the functionality that is available in the market to your specific processes to identify any gaps in functionality fast. This also helps ascertain and quantify how the new technology has improved operations. When you define standard functionality, identify gaps that are critical and unique to your processes, and establish where automation has the greatest fit, you'll be able to adjust and scale your strategy in other executional areas.

Moving best practices forward

The continued interest and growth opportunities for automation and material handling equipment will continue to accelerate as new fulfillment requirements, safety measures, cost management and profitability strategies are implemented into warehousing facilities. As McKinsey and Co states in a recent article, “It is estimated that by 2030, most operations could be automated as AI takes over the more simple and repetitive tasks that humans previously performed.”² If this trajectory remains accurate, more organizations will tailor their operations to remain competitive and innovative. Companies laying the foundation for their own increased use of automation need a trusted technology partner to deliver full system functionality and streamlined implementation with third-party applications.

¹E. Mazareanu. “Size of the warehouse automation market worldwide from 2012 to 2026,” Statista.com, Oct 2020.
²Galea-Pace, Sean. “McKinsey: what is the future of automation?” Supply Chain Digital, May 2020.

[LEARN MORE](#) 

Follow us:     



Infor builds business software for specific industries in the cloud. With 17,000 employees and over 67,000 customers in more than 170 countries, Infor software is designed for progress. To learn more, please visit www.infor.com.