

# Guide to Know Everything about Warehouse picking



## Warehouse Picking

A Complete Guide

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Picking process was given the least importance in the past but off late, warehouse managers have realized the importance of a strategic picking process. This is mainly due to the fact that the fulfillment orders have increased so much that in order to fulfill each order accurately, you need to have a well-organized picking process.

So, what exactly is the 'picking process' and the various ways of doing it?

In this article, we will discuss it all.

## **What is ‘picking’ and why is it important?**

Picking is basically a process of finding the products from the racks in the warehouse, extracting it, and giving it to the concerned customer or department for packing it.

It is a labor-intensive process where a warehouse staff needs to move from one shelf to the other for retrieving the products ordered by the customer. However, in recent times, various technologies have come up for improving the picking process.

So, why is the picking process given so much importance?

It is because an efficient picking means delivering orders faster and accurately. Order picking directly impacts upon customer satisfaction and thereby affecting a business’s profitability.

Hence, it is the most essential part of the order fulfillment process, and therefore, a lot of methods and techniques have been invented to improve the picking process.

Let’s take a look at different methods of order picking

## **Different types of picking methods**



Image credit: [Remy Ludo Gieling on Unsplash](#)

Several different methods are used for picking by different warehouses as per their needs and demands. Here are some of the most commonly used methods:

- **Discrete picking**

One of the popular picking methods is discrete picking, this is mainly because it is easy and simple to implement in any warehouse. In this method, a picker simply goes to pick each product one by one ordered by a customer until the entire ordered items are picked.

The method is ideal for small warehouses or with a limited product offering since it is time-consuming to handpick each item in the order of one customer and then pick items for another customer order.

The biggest benefit of this method is that it becomes easy to track the order and accurately get all the items ordered by the customer. It also leads to customer satisfaction and hence, profitable for the business.

However, this method can be cumbersome for a big warehouse with a wide range of products and a high volume of orders.

### - Zone Picking

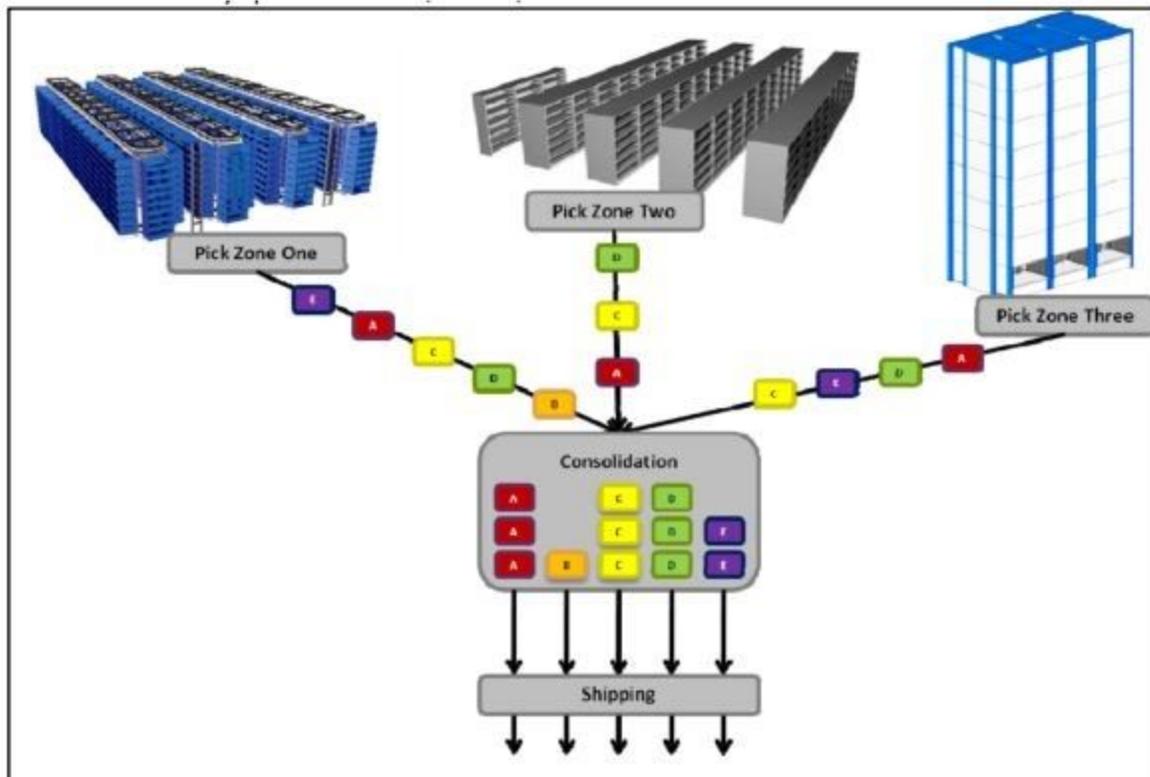


Image credit: <https://www.estesgrp.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/WavePicking.jpg>

So, the solution to the above-mentioned situation is Zone picking.

It is simple to understand this method, a picker simply picks the product that falls in his zone and passes on. Similarly, another picker will also pick the items that fall in his zone and pass it on. A combination of all the items from different zones completes the order of multiple customers, which is then sorted for the individual customer and then packed together and delivered to the customer.

Therefore, this method is also known as “pick and pass”.

The main advantage of zone picking is that all the products are divided into several zones as per their categories and each zone has their specifically assigned pickers. hence, it becomes easy to retrieve the products in a huge warehouse and it also saves time and effort of the picker because his area of running around to grab the product is limited.

This methodology is, therefore, ideal for the warehouses that are big and stores various SKUs of different kinds of products.

#### - **Batch Picking**

Batch picking is an ideal methodology when a picker has to travel long distances just to grab all the products.

Under this method, a picker takes multiple orders and picks the orders of the same products by multiple customers all at once. A picker only travels once to the specified zone and collects the products for fulfilling multiple customer orders. Thus, saving him/her time and effort of running around the same racks multiple times to fulfill several orders.

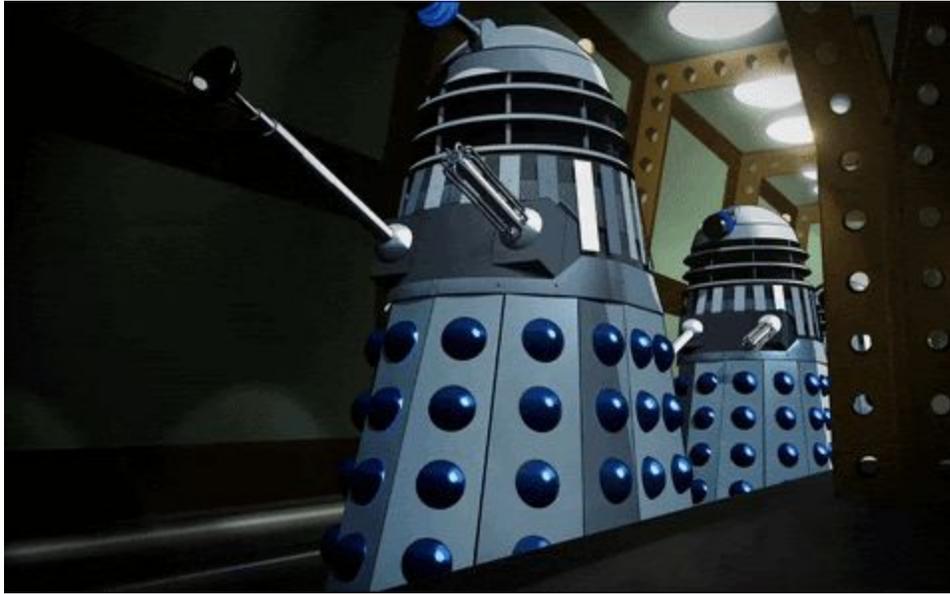
#### - **Wave picking**

Wave picking is one step more to the zone and batch picking. Once the pickers from different zones have delivered the products to the central packing desk. A picker segregates the products as per individual customer's order from the items received from several zone pickers. This sorted order is then packed for each customer separately.

The biggest benefit of this order is that a scheduled time of the day is allotted for sorting the orders and therefore, it saves time and efforts of the sorter.

## Automated warehouse picking systems

### - Robots



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Automation in a warehouse is common these days and robots have changed the way things are moved around in the warehouse. Robotic arms were introduced in the warehouses in the 1960s for the purpose of transporting one thing from one place to the other. Ever since then there has been no looking back.

As per US Census Bureau,

“The average U.S. warehouse wastes 6.9 weeks a year on unnecessary motion—costing the industry \$4.3 billion, or 265 million hours of labor annually”

Various kinds of robots are used these days for picking Automated Guided Vehicles, Autonomous Mobile Robots, Cobots (Collaborative Robots), etc. All these robots have the ability to navigate within the warehouse using magnetic strips and fetch the order

items with the help of data fed into their system such as product location, sensors, cameras, etc.

Few of the advantages of using robots for picking are as follows:

- The Robots prove to be efficient pickers as they can reach on the top shelves as well as lower shelves with ease.
- They can move faster and pave their way automatically using sensors and cameras.
- Robots eliminate human errors
- They are flexible and can work for long periods of time.

- **Voice picking equipment**

Voice picking is the latest technology being used in the warehouse. It is convenient to use and the best thing is, it is paperless. Voice picking is also known as Voice-directed warehousing (VDW), speech-based picking, and pick by voice.

Voice picking uses voice prompts for order picking and directs the picker to pick locations, gives instructions on the picking tasks. A picker has a headset with a mic that is connected to the mobile phone and it gives instruction over the headphones so that the process can be fulfilled hands-free. Once the picker collects the item he scans the barcode or gives feedback verbally to the system to complete the order picking.

- **Mobile scanner based picking**



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height="288" frameBorder="0" class="giphy-embed"
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href="https://giphy.com/gifs/Lifesum-barcode-lifesum-scanner-joSeYhY7IhYRlFBcsf"
>via GIPHY</a></p>
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This is one of the most convenient and easy to use picking methods. An app is downloaded on the mobile phone that helps in scanning the barcodes of the products that are ordered by customers.

This method provides 100% picking accuracy as it clearly shows which all items are picked and which items are pending. The system enables a real-time update on order fulfillment.

## **How to choose a picking method for your business?**

With so many different picking methods it is bound to be that you're confused about which method to use in your warehouse. All the methods mentioned above have their own advantages and disadvantages and selecting the right picking method will depend on your nature of business.

But, worry not. Here are a few points that you must take into consideration while choosing a picking method.

- First and foremost you need to know the number of orders or transactions that you get on average in a day.
- Secondly, how many kinds of products do you sell? Are they fast-moving products? You can categorize the stock of items as per the sale of these products and then decide your location strategy for easy picking of the fast-moving items.
- Calculate number of picks usually done on a given order
- Track picks for a given SKU. This will help you determine which SKUs are fast-moving.

On the basis of these points, you can devise a picking strategy. It can be a combination of wave and batch picking or zone and wave picking. You can also combine these methods of picking with the technology your order volume is greater.

## **Best Practices for Warehouse Picking**

Order picking is undoubtedly an essential part of your business and hence it is necessary to apply proper strategies for executing stock picking. Nevertheless, order picking can be performed efficiently only when certain standard practices are followed by you.

### **1. Keep your inventory or stock consistently stocked**

It is needless to say that effective picking can be done only when the stock of products is consistently taken care of. Stock your products as per the customer demand so that it is readily available when a picker or a robot goes to pick the ordered items.

### **2. Invest in smart automation for picking in your warehouse**

Minimize the number of hands that do the picking process and use automations like robots, autonomous mobile robots, AGV, corobots etc. These robots help in not just reducing picking errors and faster order fulfillment but they also help in keeping the staff safe because these robots perform the dangerous tasks within a warehouse.

### **3. Optimize warehouse picking routes**

Facility managers and warehouse managers should arrange the warehouse in such a manner that there are quick and easy pathways for the pickers to go collect the products.

Arranging the warehouse layout in a way that reduces walking time for the pickers is the key to faster order fulfillment.

#### **4. Place the fast moving stock strategically**

It is a good thing to place all the products in high demand in an area that is near to the packing section so that it is easy to retrieve the products. It is mostly said that a company earns nearly 80% of the revenue from the 20% of items stocked by them. This means that there is a wider scope of storing these 20% of items in an appropriate place where it is easy and quicker to pick the stock.

#### **Conclusion**

Order picking is hence, the most important activity and it requires due attention in warehouse management. The success of any business depends on order fulfilment and this is possible only when the picking process is in place.

Hope this article helps you in understanding the picking strategies in a better way so that you can implement them in your warehouse.

#### **Recommended Reading:**

- Analysis and Optimal Design of Discrete Order Picking Technologies Along a Line

<https://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/donald.eisenstein/research/DiscreteOrdPickingFinal.pdf>

- Here's what we learned at our webinar 'Optimize Fulfillment with Collaborative Robotic Picking'

<https://6river.com/blog-webinar-recap-collaborative-robotic-picking/>

- universal robot - cobot - applications - case studies

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BE6lbnfDdrU>

- How Voice Picking Works - Voice Beyond

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzoz8khyyUs>