

How to Strategize Fulfillment for When Your Product Becomes a Social Media Sensation



Consumers have more choices than ever when it comes to buying products.

Options like one-click shopping on social media sites like Instagram and TikTok have become a fast-growing part of e-commerce.



One unique feature of social media platforms makes them an attractive sales channel for many businesses: the influencer. For example, China-based clothing brand Seasum had its leggings promoted by a U.S. influencer on TikTok in late 2020. The video got hundreds of thousands of views and the leggings became the best-selling clothing item on Amazon for January and February 2021.¹ The sensation continued even longer after pop star Lizzo wore the leggings in an Instagram post.

If social media users with significant amounts of followers show off your product, a major spike in demand for that product follows. Unfortunately, that spike in demand can come as a surprise, leaving you scrambling to fulfill a sudden influx of orders.

And sometimes, it doesn't even require an influencer. Some

products go viral for no predictable reason. The founder of e-commerce seller Bad Addiction Boutique created a gray crewneck sweatshirt featuring images of pickle jars as a joke because her husband hates pickles.² After wearing it in a TikTok video, demand for the item skyrocketed, and Bad Addiction Boutique sold more than 40,000 pickle sweatshirts.

If you're partnered with a third-party logistics (3PL) provider that doesn't have the right experience in high-volume channels to keep up with these spikes, you can miss out on the opportunity that kind of buzz creates. Even worse, you can leave customers frustrated by slow fulfillment times — which ends up hurting your brand reputation instead of giving you the boost you should have enjoyed.

Social Selling Is at an All-Time High

In August 2023, HubSpot reported that 41% of consumers had discovered a product on social media in the previous three months. In the same report, they found that nearly a quarter of social media users bought a product after seeing it in an influencer's feed within the previous three months.

If you're wondering how this breaks down by social media platform, here are some statistics:



70% of Instagram's two billion active users shop on Instagram.³



55% of TikTok's one billion users have made a purchase after seeing a brand or product on the platform.⁴

As these numbers show, social media provides massive marketing potential — both paid and unpaid — as your product gets noticed, loved and discussed by influencers.



"The most powerful thing you can do as a business is get customers reviewing and talking about your products. Word-of-mouth marketing is incredibly impactful and powerful. It creates a trust factor that creates brand loyalty."

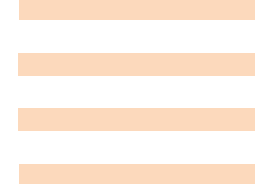
CAYCE ROY, CEO at Standvast Fulfillment



"The most powerful thing you can do as a business is get customers reviewing and talking about your products," said Cayce Roy, CEO at Standvast Fulfillment, a provider of third-party logistics services who originally defined the operations for what became Amazon Prime and Fulfillment by Amazon, both of which went on to go viral in the world of e-commerce. "Word-of-mouth marketing is incredibly impactful and powerful. It creates a trust factor that creates brand loyalty."

Today's consumer is jaded when it comes to ads and paid referrals — especially as the perception grows that sites like Facebook have become clogged with ads. But users who follow a popular influencer tend to have their guard down, particularly when they see someone they follow and like talking about a product. This parasocial relationship creates trust and, more importantly for your business, helps build brand recognition and loyalty.

Another important point: Buyers on social media tend to be younger than the general population. In the report cited above, HubSpot noted that 17% of all social media users had bought something directly on a social media platform. For Gen Z, that number rose to 22%, while 27% of millennials had purchased from social media. That means your social channels have the potential to create customers in the segments with the highest lifetime value.



The Downside of Social Media Sales

For some brands, a sudden sales spike from social media may not be viewed as a good thing. If a business can't fulfill a sudden avalanche of orders for one product, the brand can quickly trend downward. Consumers are less patient than ever, and on social media, where instant gratification is king, buyers want their purchases to arrive quickly.

It can also be challenging to predict where the actual purchase will happen. Many consumers will see a product on social media but then go to their favorite retailer to buy it, which means a trending item can drive sales spikes on multiple channels. If your 3PL partner can't keep up, customers from at least one channel are going to be left unhappy.

Stockouts and fulfillment delays ultimately contribute to a bad customer experience. And according to data from TCN, 73% of consumers will abandon a brand after a single bad experience.⁵

"You can't come back from that first impression," Roy said. "If you fail to meet your promise to customers, all that initial good that was created is destroyed."

Influencers have audiences ranging from hundreds of thousands to millions. If your product goes viral with one of these audiences, you can see massive sales overnight, which can easily overwhelm fulfillment if you aren't equipped to scale quickly.

Traditional supply chain management focuses on demand planning and forecasting, but you can't predict going viral. That traditional model can't easily flex to handle sudden surges for a specific product — or cost-effectively replenish inventory in the aftermath.

"You can't forecast going viral because it's a Black Swan event," said John Appert, CSCO at Standvast Fulfillment. "You need a system that doesn't try to forecast the Black Swan but takes the approach of making sure you can handle that event when it happens. You need a partner who can diversify your supply chain risk."



Going Viral Isn't the Only Omnichannel Challenge

Building a supply chain that can flex and scale to meet sudden spikes in demand isn't always easy, even without a product going viral on social media. Here are some struggles you might face alongside omnichannel success:

Shipping zones

If you're working with a centralized inventory in one warehouse, shipments to far-off destinations will eat into your profit margin. Parcel carriers use zone-based shipping models. To begin, Zone 1 refers to local deliveries. Zone shipping costs then start to go up in Zone 2 for deliveries over 50 miles, maxing out in Zone 8 for deliveries that must travel more than 1,800 miles. If you ship high volumes of orders beyond Zone 3 or Zone 4, you'll quickly find that the costs aren't sustainable.

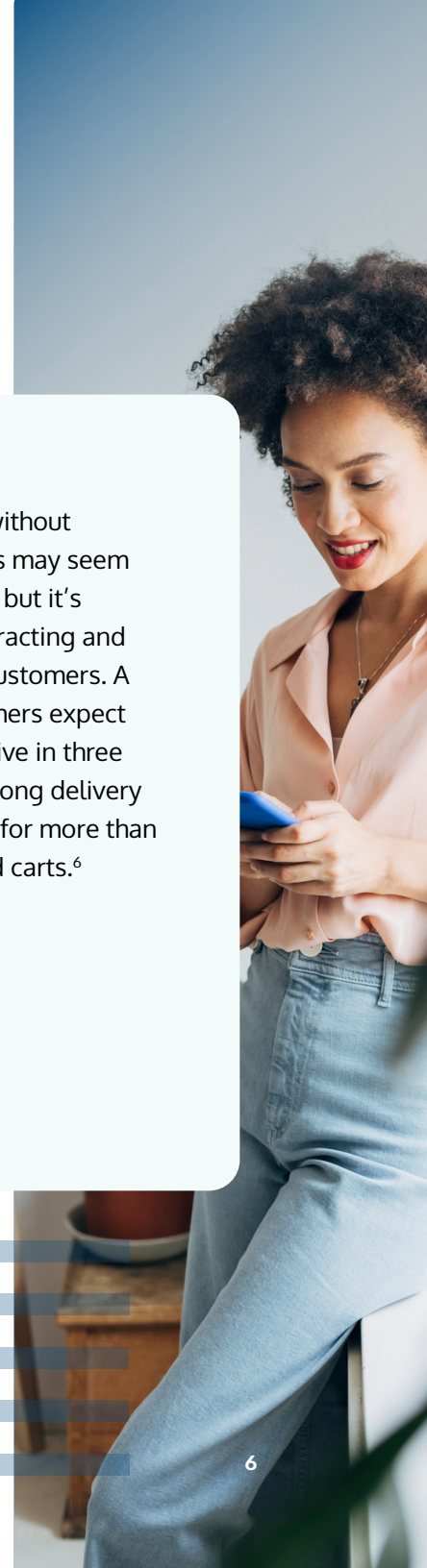
Capacity

Viral products aside, you may run into capacity issues if your business just grows too fast. Additionally, you don't want to be stuck with legacy technology or limited systems that can't efficiently manage orders during busy times.

Speed.

Speedy delivery without skyrocketing costs may seem like a pipe dream, but it's crucial to both attracting and keeping today's customers. A majority of customers expect their orders to arrive in three days or less, and long delivery windows account for more than half of abandoned carts.⁶

Scaling quickly is great, but scaling quickly without making your costs spiral out of control is a delicate balancing act. So, how do you accomplish that?



"If you miss your viral moment, you've missed it for good — that's a lot of lost sales."

JOHN APPERT, CSCO at Standvast Fulfillment



The Solution to Omnichannel Fulfillment, Even During a Demand Surge

Choosing the right fulfillment partner makes all the difference in fast-paced channels, especially social media. The wrong 3PL — one with limited capacity or warehouses in the wrong locations — can cause delivery delays that impatient social media buyers aren't inclined to forgive.

"If you miss your viral moment, you've missed it for good — that's a lot of lost sales," Appert said. "Having a partner that can react quickly in those moments and get the volume out the door accurately to your customers lets you capture all those sales that will only be there for as long as it takes the spike to go away."

If you're selling both direct-to-consumer and through high-volume channels like Amazon or big-box stores, having a 3PL partner with enough warehouse space to pool inventory and allocate it to whichever channel needs it is essential for meeting demand in a cost-effective way.

Optimizing your storage costs and delivery speeds requires a 3PL with strategically placed fulfillment centers so you can put your products closer to customers, whether those customers are end consumers or retail partners. The closer products are to final destinations, the faster you can deliver and the more cost-effective your fulfillment operation will be.

Being able to delight your customers with fast delivery while saving costs is the best-case scenario, but it's essential that you choose the right fulfillment partner to help you get there.

How to Choose the Right 3PL

The most important things to look for in a new 3PL partner are the capacity to scale, experience handling high, fast-moving inventory volumes and technology that enables simple, flexible solutions.

That last item (simplicity plus flexibility) is key. If your partner requires several months' notice before high-volume or peak sales times, will they be able to handle unexpected demand? If they can't meet that demand, how can you efficiently fulfill your promise to customers?

"If an influencer suddenly loves your product, it's going to explode, and you've got to be able to make it happen or you'll lose that opportunity," Roy said.

And remember — it's not just social media channels your 3PL must be able to handle. Your 3PL must be able to manage all your channels at once, including potential surges across multiple channels all at once.

If a large portion of your business happens on Amazon, this is even more crucial. Failing to meet customer expectations on that platform will result in losing Prime shipping status. Even worse, you may get dropped so low in search results that you're virtually invisible on the site or lose your ability to sell on Amazon at all.



Avoid problems from the beginning by choosing your 3PL wisely. Look for a delivery partner with:

- A multi-node fulfillment network that lets you keep inventory close to large customer markets.
- Simple systems that allow you to adapt quickly to surges and that are easy for your team to understand.
- Experience handling high-volume and high-variability sales channels, especially big e-commerce platforms.
- More consumers find products via social media every day. Finding the right fulfillment partner now ensures you'll be ready if a major influencer sends your product viral.

Sources

1. "TikTok Leggings on Amazon," Marketplace Pulse,
<https://www.marketplacepulse.com/articles/tiktok-leggings-on-amazon>
2. "How a TikTok Shop seller became a pickle influencer," Business Insider,
<https://www.businessinsider.com/tiktoks-pickle-sweatshirt-mania-has-been-life-changing-for-seller-2023-10>
3. "Instagram Shopping Statistics," Capital One Shopping,
<https://capitaloneshopping.com/research/instagram-shopping-statistics/>
4. "Tiktok Shop Statistics and Shopping Trends in 2023," OnlineDasher,
<https://www.onlinedasher.com/tiktok-shopping/>
5. "Understanding the Modern Consumer," TCN,
<https://go.tcn.com/ebook-customer-service-survey-2023>
6. "Survey: 62% of shoppers expect their free shipping orders to arrive in 3 business days," Retail Dive,
<https://www.retaildive.com/press-release/20220725-survey-62-of-shoppers-expect-their-free-shipping-orders-to-arrive-in-3-bu/>



Fulfill your promise.

Established in 2017, Standvast is led by industry experts reshaping the landscape of order fulfillment with centers across the United States. By enhancing or replacing components of clients' current solutions with innovative technology and fulfillment services, Standvast is reshaping the future of order fulfillment. This approach ensures that brands can compete on an equal footing with the largest players in e-commerce, leveling the supply chain playing field.

[Learn more](#)



studio / ID

BY INDUSTRY DIVE

studioID is Industry Dive's global content studio offering brands an ROI rich tool kit: Deep industry expertise, first-party audience insights, an editorial approach to brand storytelling, and targeted distribution capabilities. Our trusted in-house content marketers help brands power insights-fueled content programs that nurture prospects and customers from discovery through to purchase, connecting brand to demand.

LEARN MORE