

With a constantly changing world, it's important to keep up.

If you're looking for some tips to improve your warehouse operations this year, consider the following:

1. Define you're the current issues and objectives first.

Look at the issues you have currently, what your objective is and then look at what you need to do to make the change. Our ["Spot your Bottleneck"](#) resource may help you with this.

2. Maximise and optimise all available space.

Rather than expand the footprint of your warehouse, consider better use of vertical space. Adding taller storage units and the right equipment to pick and store material can help you keep more in the same square footage, rather than adding expansion costs. Storing small items on pallet racks wastes space and makes it easy to misplace items. Rather than using the same racks throughout your warehouse, you may need various types of shelving for different materials. Also, try using standardised bins to help keep shelves neat and to effort out of the pick and pack process.

3. Lean inventory.

It's estimated that inventory takes 20 to 30 percent of its cost to maintain it. Adopting lean inventory for your warehouse is just as important as it is in manufacturing. The basic premise of lean is only what you need, and nothing more. Possibly reduce or eliminate buffer stocks and try to get suppliers to deliver smaller quantities more frequently. Implement a Kanban system to product availability without overstocking.

4. Adopt enabling technology.

A warehouse management system (WMS) can improve efficiency by suggesting the best routes and methods for picking or put-away. In addition, the system provides automated pick lists that can be sent to mobile readers and devices to help eliminate mistakes and reduce wasted time and paper. Your warehouse will be neater and greener and you'll know the accurate fulfilment status.

5. Design workstations to suit the task.

Organising workstations improves productivity because workers do not have to search for tools or equipment. Use the "5S" method from lean manufacturing to ensure your workstations are as organised as possible. It consists of: Sort; Set in order; Shine; Standardize; and Sustain — all techniques designed to keep clutter at bay, reduce errors, and improve safety and organisation. Make sure worker ergonomics are considered for the person and task.

6. Optimise labour efficiency.

If your WMS doesn't have the ability to generate efficient picking plans, create them manually. Analyse your material usage patterns, and store high-volume items together near the front of the warehouse to eliminate travel time. Store items that are frequently sold together near one another and make sure there is something to distinguish item that could easily be mistook one for the other. Consider including an image of the item on the item label to act as a double check measure.

7. Engage your team.

Your team will be the first to notice process shortcomings – make sure they know where to go with feedback and listen to it when it comes. Keep them on your side – are they safe and comfortable doing their job? Make sure they understand the process and why it is like it is but reward creative ideas. Consider training and cross training to ensure they know the whole process and adapt to other tasks if required.

8. Keep equipment maintained.

A breakdown during use wastes time and costs money in repairs – make sure your equipment is ready to use all the time, using out of normal hours for scheduled maintenance. Check on all equipment on a reoccurring basis – don't just look at machinery with moving parts – consider all the items you use to fulfil the task.

9. Always look at ways to improve.

Remember that what works this year may not necessarily work next year - your operations and the technologies available evolve. Regularly re-evaluate the process to ensure it is meeting your goals – sometimes a small increase in efficiency can add up to huge savings over a time period. With a flexible mindset and kaizen principles, you can easily adapt to changing market dynamics and shift gears when things don't go according to plan.

Follow these simple nine tips and watch your efficiency soar this year; helping your bottom line and giving your customers what they want, when they want it.