



**Top Five Questions to Answer Before  
Choosing a Warehouse Management  
Software (WMS) Solution**



ASCENT WAREHOUSE LOGISTICS DIGITAL LEARNING SERIES:

# Top Five Questions to Answer Before Choosing a Warehouse Management Software (WMS) Solution

Warehouse Management Software (WMS) can help you optimize how your warehouse and/or distribution center functions. It tracks the storage and movement of inventory in real time, reducing manual errors, improving efficiencies, and increasing productivity overall.

But over the past few years as warehouse and distribution operations have grown more and more complicated, sorting through all the WMS platforms and features now available has become increasingly difficult and time-consuming.

Finding the right WMS provider may seem a bit daunting at first. But if you take a methodical approach and answer these five questions, you should be able to choose a WMS solution confident that you are making the most informed choice possible.





***Does the WMS vendor you're considering have proven success in your industry and with challenges similar to yours?***

Every industry—whether it's food and beverage, pharmaceuticals, medical devices, e-commerce, manufacturing, or any other—has a distinct set of operational processes and methods that can be supported by WMS.

That's why it is critical to make sure you're partnering with a WMS vendor with experience in your operational environment and with business challenges similar to yours.

Ask potential providers about their work histories and how they have helped drive measurable improvements in warehouse management for companies in your industry.

Be aware that many basic WMS systems are bolt-on modules that

may lack functionality for your particular environment.

Instead, look for a WMS vendor team with the skillset to perform the appropriate analysis—essentially auditing every single process step as part of the system design—and then make the most meaningful recommendations.

Of course, finding the right vendor also involves trust. Your WMS will become the cornerstone of your warehouse operations, storing and managing some of your company's most important information.

Be sure to choose a solution that's backed by a company with a proven track record of reliability, consistency, and ongoing support.



### *Is the WMS solution architected to drive process improvement?*

Typically, there are at least two layers of capabilities in a WMS solution. The first is Warehouse Control System (WCS) capabilities that are used to control the movement of cases, cartons, totes, or pallets on a conveyor, sortation, or AS/RS systems.

The second is the actual WMS which can interface between Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) platforms and the automated equipment. Make sure the solution you choose has both layers and specifically includes the WCS architecture required to drive process improvement.

Put another way, you do not want software that will simply replicate how you receive, replenish, pick, cycle, and count on your ERP system.

Instead, you want a WMS that's actually built towards optimizing those processes. Keep in mind that WMS sold as modules often inherit all of the inefficiencies of the ERP architecture they get bolted onto.

They're not built to direct operations, improve accuracies, ramp up efficiencies, and increase productivity. They're simply built around the ERP architecture—and that can lead to significant shortcomings in the functionality needed to drive process improvement.

For example, if you're moving from a manual paper-based process to mobile devices, a bolt-on WMS module may continue to force operators through redundant non-value added steps for routine warehouse operations.



## *Will the WMS solution be able to scale and adapt as your business grows and technology advances?*

The warehouse environment is complex—and getting more so all the time. You need WMS that can scale and adapt as your business, or your industry as a whole, changes.

Maybe you're in an environment that requires hands-free picking and you might want to implement voice-picking in the future.

Or maybe you're thinking that, down the road, you will have to add another kind of automation, whether that's more vertical carousels, horizontal carousels, vertical lift modules, or some other format of a robotic or AS/RS goods-to-person application.

Your goal should be to find a WMS solution that can support whatever you

need to tackle today and whatever you're looking to tackle in the future.

Are you among the many manufacturers and distributors currently adapting to the omnichannel? Is the technology you're using up to the task?

You'll save time and resources by selecting a WMS provider with the expertise and agility to keep pace with your changing business needs. You want to avoid having to continually add third-party WMS as your business grows.

Once you start using more than one or two of bolt-on modules, you have created a customized environment that's difficult and costly to maintain.





### ***How will the WMS solution be implemented and what will determine success?***

Ask the vendors you're considering to describe precisely how your WMS solution will be deployed and how the results will be measured.

The WMS provider you choose should be able to explain how WMS will improve your business processes—and they should be able to do so using terminology that you understand.

What's important here is that the vendor is knowledgeable not just about the software, but also about configuring the software in a way that will optimize your warehouse operations.

In addition, there needs to be a way to measure those improvements.

Talk to the vendors you're considering about the results they have seen for process improvement in similar industries with similar challenges and look for a team that fully understands the steps your operators have to go through to complete their picks.

That's the best way to make sure you are getting a WMS solution that will give you real, quantifiable results.



### *How easily will the WMS solution you're considering integrate with your existing ERP system?*

You want your new solution to integrate completely with your existing ERP system so that the WMS can optimize all of your warehouse and distribution processes, while at the same time keeping your ERP current in real-time.

However, you don't want to have to sacrifice process improvement to achieve this level of integration. Sometimes, a WMS module that bolts onto ERP might seem like a good option because it can get you up and running fast.

But a bolt-on module may not actually solve the challenges you have in the warehouse. In these cases, the margin of difference can be substantial in terms of accuracy improvement, labor reduction, and productivity improvement.

Do you really want to give up all of that for a perceived ease of integration? Aim for complete functional integration between your WMS and ERP, even if it takes a little more time.

That way, you'll be able to take full advantage of a wide range of order management and picking methodologies, including zone picking, pick and pass, wave picking, and batch and cluster picking.

Complete functional integration also enables automated warehouses to be able to automate replenishments from overstock to forward locations and use hands-free technologies like voice picking, vertical carousels, horizontal carousels, vertical lift modules, pick by light, and put by light.



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