

E-Commerce Scenario

The enterprise scenario we will simulate is a company selling sports apparel online.

You can guess the basics: items are purchased, put on sale, and then sold and delivered.

For the details, you'll be getting a single page with some role-specific information for our Role-Playing Game.

Delivery

Whenever an order is placed, you'll have to make sure it is fulfilled.

Most orders are single items. They must be packaged and delivered to the customer's selected address.

Things become more complicated when an order includes more items since we might have to put them in the same package, assuming they're in the same warehouse.

Sometimes, we run out of supplies, too, so we might have to wait to have the ordered goods delivered or ask our procurement office for replenishment.

Other times, we might dispatch portions of the order from different warehouses to the same customer if the purchased goods are available at different locations.

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Customer Care

We are the first line of support towards our customers.

We're responding on multiple channels: a live chat (well, there's a chatbot, but it's a little more than a conversation starter), an e-mail, and a phone number per country.

We have dedicated software to manage our time slots—to ensure continuity in our service—and access to the main system to resolve first-level issues.

Hard-to-solve issues are usually forwarded to the claim office; we try to avoid entering that space.

However, customer care mostly means adding a touch of empathy and simply answering questions from potential new customers.

If the same questions recur frequently, we forward them to the technical team. The information on the website may not be clear, or maybe some weird issue is happening.

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Claims

Whenever there is a shipment, there are possible problems.

Items can be lost, stolen or damaged along the way.

Local shipments can be so slow that customers start pinging us about the status of their package, even if the expectations are clear on the website.

Of course, the wrong item can be delivered, and all sorts of bad things can happen.

We need to access all the possible information about the order's state to understand better what went wrong. We also need to be able to implement corrective actions, like creating a discount code, issuing a refund, or scheduling another shipment if the original one is declared lost.

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Pricing

Setting the right price is an art; ideally, we'd like predictable margins, but this is not necessarily achievable in a world of fluctuating prices.

We'll need to keep the cost side under control, eventually triggering changes in our base prices and ancillary services (even shipping cost can be subject to variations, and free shipping, when available, might need to be factored in in the overall calculation).

We expect much collaboration with the data coming from Finance, but pricing isn't just the result of an equation: we have competitors, too! We need to know our relationship with the market to avoid down-pricing more than necessary or to recognise items where our price isn't competitive.

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Packaging

This should be easy, but it's not.

If everything goes according to plan, we receive a Bill of Materials to be put inside one or more packages; once we close the package, we can seal it and declare it ready for shipping.

Scanners and barcodes are helping us not to make mistakes and making the job ultra-boring.

Luckily, the warehouse seems to have a life on its own: items are often not where they're expected to be. Sometimes, we declared the items lost or stolen only to find them a few months later in a different position. Things are better with computerised warehouses, but they're not yet covering every item and every warehouse.

And then there are other disasters: from a coffee spilt over a t-shirt to a bit of flooding, fires, and ...why not? Rats!

In general, having a light inventory provides better financial margins, but too little inventory duplicates the effort to solve the physiological issues.

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Shipping

A network of local partners performs the actual shipping.

We negotiate their prices and the service level agreements.

If prices are too low, quality tends to degrade quickly, so we have to keep the situation under control (and stay in touch with our colleagues in the Claims department who have some precious information)

Every local shipping company has its own format, but of course, it's not exactly the same. Luckily, it tends to be the same when working with international providers, so a more sophisticated integration is possible.

To make life easier for our Customer Care, we're trying to make order status available to customers based on the shipping events we're receiving from our suppliers.

This service is only available with a few of them, but we're trying to extend it to other players when possible.

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Fraud Detection

Most customers are great, but we must ensure the system stays healthy.

We're looking for patterns that could lead to fraud, and of course, we are learning from the holes we discovered in the past.

By definition, fraud is happening in places where we didn't think it was possible, but some of the lessons learned include

- shipping companies that didn't ship (the salary was so low that rounding up with some gift seemed fair to some temp driver);
- warehouse staff that picked some items, sometimes closing the package so that it looked great;
- Customers who wanted an extra shipment for stuff that was actually delivered;

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Catalogue Management

We make sure the items on sale are sellable. ;-)

Item descriptions need to be consistent even if they're coming from different sources, and they need to fit the available space on the page.

The same goes for pictures: we'd like to provide a consistent experience on the website, which often means re-shooting some items with the same light and resolution.

We may receive the catalogue from external parties, usually in Excel or other formats. Big Players have more structured formats, like APIs, that allow more streamlined integration, while small suppliers are a pain we're getting used to.

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Legal

We're doing business in different countries, and legal terms can differ in every new country.

The legal team gets involved when opening new markets, negotiating new contracts, and when issues arise between us and partners and suppliers.

Claims are another source of inspiration: some customers can be so dissatisfied that they threaten to sue us. It doesn't usually happen, but there have been cases.

Consumer associations can be another source of pain, especially when we need to check that our suppliers respect legal rights and that our environmental footprint is under control.

We're trying to behave responsibly, even if this means extra work. But we're a business, so the 'social responsibility line' isn't always straightforward.

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Sales

We are the only department making money!

Revenues come from online sales, but some special orders can still be managed offline (like a school buying sports uniforms for all its students in a single shot), possibly leading to special discounts.

Online sales usually happen via credit card and are managed via Stripe, but alternative payment methods are available locally. Paypal is cool in the Western world, and AliPay is strong in China and the Far East, but the list is longer.

In some countries, it's ok to accept some risk and wait for a deferred payment; in other countries, it's "money first, shipment later", but we have to ensure we are responsive with refunds.

In any case, we collaborate with the Fraud Detection team to ensure the risk pattern is compatible with pricing and risk.

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Marketing

We are the ones that try to boost sales with every possible weapon.

Given the current prices and targets for the current quarter, we define a strategy for promotions and discounts, as well as advertising on external platforms, websites, news magazines, and sometimes TV channels.

Promotional campaigns can also include different media and discounts like "Magic March! - all walking shoes are discounted 25% until April 1st."

Some marketing tools trigger expectations and need to be repeated, like Amazon's Black Friday, while others will become boring in the long run.

To stand out, we'll need fresh ideas! It's too bad the development team is constantly rejecting them.

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Finance

Somebody is going to keep the numbers under control.

We have daily, weekly, and monthly summaries, plus the more bureaucratic end-of-quarter reports that need to be shared with the board and key stakeholders.

We share our data with other departments and sometimes give them targets (!).

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Procurement

We're purchasing and selecting the goods to sell on our website.

We're scouting partners and producers, from big names (you know them) to local craft shops (hand-made soccer shoes are a thing).

We negotiate the deal and the capacity we need from the producers.

For some commodity items—like white socks—we might pick the most favourable supplier, while others have more powerful brand power.

We work closely with Sales and Warehouse management to provide the optimal replenishment stream and avoid running short of supplies.

