

5 Reasons to Automate Ecommerce Fulfillment Now

A black robotic arm with a gripper is shown in a warehouse setting, reaching into a black bin filled with various items. The gripper is holding a blue baseball cap. The bin has several compartments, some containing yellow containers and other items. The background shows a window and some structural elements of the warehouse.

Explore how automation can increase capacity, strengthen fulfillment performance, and prepare your operation for growth.



**BERKSHIRE
GREY®**



The New Ecommerce Fulfillment Reality

Ecommerce growth is increasing pressure inside fulfillment operations.

In Q2 2026, U.S. retail ecommerce sales reached \$340.2 billion, up 12.2% year over year, and represented 17.1% of retail sales.

That growth puts fulfillment capacity in focus. Every unit must be unloaded, picked, consolidated, sorted, packed, and moved on time.

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Legacy processes were built for predictable volume and stable order profiles. Today, operators manage more channels, SKU variability, tighter delivery promises, and persistent labor constraints.

The question is not whether to automate everything, but where automation can remove friction, protect service, and create room to grow.

This guide examines five pressure points and what to evaluate before you automate.

CHALLENGE #1

Labor capacity is hard to stabilize.

Picking, consolidation, sortation, and unloading still depend on repetitive physical work. Hiring more people can add short-term capacity, but recruiting, training, turnover, and peak staffing make that capacity difficult to sustain. When headcount falls short, orders queue, overtime rises, and experienced employees absorb the strain.

58% of respondents to the 2026 MHI Annual Industry Report identified talent acquisition and workforce challenges as a leading supply chain concern.

Source: [MHI Solutions](#)

WHY AUTOMATE?

Make output less dependent on headcount.

Use automation to take on repeatable, physically demanding tasks while people manage exceptions, quality, maintenance, and flow. Start where unfilled roles, overtime, or ergonomic risk repeatedly limit the operation. A focused deployment can make throughput more predictable and give the existing team better tools for peak demand.



BG Scoop™ unloads 1,000–2,000 parcels per hour*, reducing reliance on manual trailer unloading.

* Performance varies by trailer condition and average package size.



CHALLENGE #2

Order volume and variability keep rising.

Growth isn't just more units. It's more order profiles, more destinations, more packaging types, and more daily volatility. Promotions, marketplace demand, and peak periods can change the work mix faster than a fixed manual process can adapt. Capacity that looks adequate on an average day can fail when the mix changes.

U.S. retail ecommerce sales grew **12.2%** year over year in Q2 2026, while total retail sales grew **6.7%**.

Source: [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

WHY AUTOMATE?

Add capacity that can scale with demand.

Automation can create repeatable capacity for the work that drives congestion, such as item picking, order consolidation, and sortation. Modular systems can be expanded as volume grows, without redesigning the entire building. Evaluate performance against your real SKU mix, order lines, cutoff times, and peak profile – not a generic units-per-hour claim.



BG Stride™ scales from 4,000 to 60,000+ units per hour, helping operations increase capacity as demand grows.

CHALLENGE #3

Delivery promises leave less time inside the warehouse.

Customers judge delivery at checkout, but the promise depends on what happens before the carrier receives the package. Slow picks, long walks, congested consolidation, and missed sortation windows consume the time available for transportation. The faster the promise, the less room there is for rework or an unpredictable queue.

67% of online shoppers surveyed by DHL in 2026 had abandoned a cart because of the delivery offering.

Source: [DHL](#)

WHY AUTOMATE?

Shorten and stabilize the order cycle.

Automate the steps that determine whether orders make the next cutoff. Robotic picking can make item handling more consistent, while automated material movement and sortation can reduce walking and manual transfers. Coordinating those steps with order priorities and downstream capacity helps work reach the correct destination on time. The goal is not maximum speed at one station. It's dependable flow from release to ready-to-ship, with enough resilience to absorb variability.



A useful business case measures order cycle time, cutoff attainment, throughput by hour, and the cost of exceptions before and after automation.

CHALLENGE #4

Fulfillment errors put loyalty at risk.

A wrong item, incomplete order, or damaged product can trigger customer service work, replacement shipments, returns, and additional handling. Each recovery consumes time and margin while putting the customer relationship at risk. Error risk increases when people are rushed, new to the role, or switching among variable products and processes.

76% of U.S. shoppers surveyed in 2025 said a positive delivery experience influenced their decision to buy from a brand again.

Source: [Sifted](#)

WHY AUTOMATE?

Build accuracy into the workflow.

Automation can combine perception, item tracking, controlled handling, and verification so the process doesn't depend on memory or manual checks alone. Prioritize workflows where mis-picks, mis-sorts, damage, and rework are measurable. Then validate performance with your products, packaging, and exception rules.



BG Core™ delivers >99% accuracy and >99% uptime.*

* Performance depends on the configured application and SKU mix.



CHALLENGE #5

Omnichannel turns inventory into many different commitments.

A single facility may replenish stores, ship direct-to-consumer orders, stage pickup orders, and support wholesale demand. Each flow has different destinations, cutoffs, container types, and service rules. When processes and inventory signals are disconnected, teams spend more time expediting, searching, and recovering from exceptions.

31% of U.S. online shoppers reported using buy online, pick up in store (BOPIS). Avoiding shipping fees and finding items in stock nearby were the leading reasons.

Source: [Ryder](#)

WHY AUTOMATE?

Route each item to the right channel.

Automation can support shared inventory by tracking items through picking, consolidation, and sortation, then directing them to the correct order, store, or outbound lane. Look for flexible routing and destination assignment rather than a system optimized for one fixed flow. That flexibility matters when channel mix shifts by day or season.



Flexible automation can route inventory to stores, direct-to-consumer orders, and wholesale destinations within one operation, allowing capacity to shift with demand.



Automation Solutions to Consider

Start with the workflow that creates the clearest operational constraint. Evaluate the solution with your SKU mix, volumes, building, systems, service levels, and exception paths.



Robotic Picking

Robotic picking automates the transfer of individual items into totes, cartons, or other fulfillment systems. It can reduce repetitive manual work and support consistent output, with performance depending on the SKU mix, item presentation, and placement requirements.

Core Robotic Picking System

combines perception, adaptive gripping, motion planning, and controlled placement for high-SKU-variability workflows. It handles difficult items and adapts to new SKUs and packaging changes without SKU-specific retraining. Precise placement supports container density, order quality, and downstream flow. Core delivers >99% accuracy and >99% uptime.



Trailer Unloading

Trailer unloading remains one of the most manual and physically demanding workflows in the fulfillment network. Automation can help maintain consistent inbound parcel flow while reducing repetitive lifting and handling inside confined trailers, easing physical strain on workers.

Scoop Robotic Trailer Unloader

combines bulk unloading and parcel handling inside trailers and containers to manage structured and unstructured loads, loose floor piles, and mixed packaging. Scoop processes 1,000–2,000 parcels per hour and can support up to a 1:5 operator-to-system ratio, depending on operating conditions.



High-Density Sortation

High-density sortation routes items to stores, orders, or other destinations within a compact footprint. Automated routing and handling can reduce walking and manual work, helping operations increase throughput, use labor more efficiently, and accommodate more destinations within existing facilities.

Stride Robotic Shuttle Sorter

uses independent shuttles to sort merchandise directly into store or order containers. Eligible same-SKU units can be inducted together, and configured completion rules trigger automatic container takeaway. Stride supports 4,000–60,000+ units per hour with a 50% smaller footprint and 25% greater SKU eligibility than traditional conveyor-based sortation.

Build the Business Case Around Your Operation

The right automation project begins with the work, not the equipment. Define the constraint. Establish a baseline. Test the real SKUs and order profiles. Account for exceptions, integration, uptime, service requirements, and growth. Then compare the investment with the operational value it can deliver.

Berkshire Grey analyzes facility conditions, workflow data, SKUs, orders, and system requirements before specifying a solution.

TALK TO AN EXPERT

About Berkshire Grey

Berkshire Grey, a SoftBank Group wholly owned subsidiary, is a global leader in AI-driven robotics that transforms warehouse and fulfillment operations for parcels and logistics providers, 3PLs, retailers and ecommerce customers. The company provides end-to-end automation solutions at scale across critical, high-volume workflows, from picking and sortation through dock automation. Powered by deep expertise in robotics, artificial intelligence, and software, Berkshire Grey enables customers to reduce labor risk, increase throughput, and flex operations in response to rapidly changing demand.