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Shop Operations

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Material Procurement: Timing

Orders to Hit Turnaround Promises

Why procurement timing — not shop floor speed — is usually what determines whether a turnaround promise gets kept.



1. Why procurement timing is a promise-keeping problem

A shop's quoted turnaround is almost always written as "X business days from when materials arrive" — which means the single biggest lever on whether that promise gets kept isn't shop floor speed, it's how quickly and reliably materials get ordered after the customer commits. A procurement process that waits until "the shop gets to it" quietly erodes every turnaround promise made on the quote.

2. The trigger: what starts the order

Define one clear, consistent event that triggers material ordering — typically the customer's deposit or full payment clearing — and order the same day or next business day, every time, regardless of how busy the shop is. An inconsistent trigger (sometimes ordered same-day, sometimes "whenever") is the most common cause of a shop's actual turnaround drifting away from its quoted turnaround.

Shop practice

Use the payment event itself as the procurement cue rather than relying on a person to remember to place the order — whatever system records payment (point of sale, accounting software, a shared job board) should be the same system that flags "materials need to be ordered" for that job.

3. Lead time by material category

MATERIAL	WHAT AFFECTS LEAD TIME
In-stock shop fabric	Fastest — available same-day from shop inventory if stocked in sufficient yardage
Mill-order fabric (not in shop stock)	Depends on the mill's own stock and shipping; some patterns/colors run on longer cutting lead times than others — confirm current lead time at the time of order, not from memory of the last order
Foam and filling	Usually fast for standard densities; custom-cut or specialty foam can carry longer lead times
Hardware (springs, webbing, fasteners, specialty trim)	Generally fast if stocked; confirm lead time on any specialty or custom hardware before quoting a turnaround that depends on it
Customer-supplied material (COM)	Entirely outside shop control — the quoted turnaround clock should start when COM physically arrives at the shop, not when the customer says they ordered it

4. Buffer and communication

- Build a small buffer into the quoted turnaround beyond the material supplier's stated lead time — suppliers' own estimates slip, and a shop that quotes the supplier's best case will miss its own promise whenever the supplier does.
- If a material delay happens, tell the customer proactively as soon as it's known, with a revised date — a customer who hears about a delay from the shop before they have to ask stays a customer; one who has to call and ask why their furniture isn't ready yet usually doesn't.

- Track material lead times by supplier over time so quotes reflect reality rather than an outdated assumption.

Sources

General shop operating framework. Calibrate lead-time assumptions to your own supplier relationships and order history.

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