

Enterprise Retailers Leverage High-Density Store Networks to Bridge the Quick-Commerce Fulfilment Gap in APAC

ETP Group drives urban logistics shift with store-based micro-fulfilment across Asia-Pacific.

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- The most consequential question facing established retailers in the age of quick commerce may not be how fast they can build another warehouse. It may be whether they can make better use of the stores they already have.

Across Asia-Pacific, consumers are becoming increasingly comfortable with compressed delivery windows. What began largely as a proposition for groceries and everyday essentials is moving into broader categories, including personal care, fashion, consumer electronics and other general merchandise. In India, for example, quick-commerce operators are now exploring delivery of large appliances and electronics within minutes, signalling how rapidly expectations around speed and convenience are expanding.

The shift is creating an uncomfortable strategic equation for traditional retail enterprises. Large-format retailers, department stores and multi-brand chains may have thousands of products distributed across hundreds of locations, often much closer to customers than a regional distribution centre. Yet that physical advantage does not automatically translate into digital fulfilment speed. Inventory sitting 5 kilometres from a customer is commercially valuable only if the retailer knows it is there, can promise it confidently, can identify the most efficient location from which to fulfil the order, and can execute the transaction without disrupting the store's primary role as a selling environment.

This is where the next phase of [unified commerce](#) is taking shape.

Rather than treating the physical store and digital fulfilment operation as separate businesses,



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retailers are increasingly looking at the store network itself as a distributed logistics asset.

The Store May Be the Retailer's Most Underused Fulfilment Network

The economics of quick commerce have traditionally been associated with dark stores, micro-fulfilment centres and purpose-built logistics infrastructure. But Southeast Asia presents a different structural picture.

Southeast Asia's quick-commerce market reached US\$7.3 billion in GMV in 2025, equivalent to 4.6% of the region's e-commerce market. More importantly, its analysis argues that Southeast Asia's path differs from China and India because offline retail remains dense, fragmented and highly localized. Rather than replacing physical retail, quick commerce in the region can increasingly function as an on-demand fulfilment layer over existing retail infrastructure.

That distinction has major implications for established retailers.

A retailer with a dense network of stores across Mumbai, Jakarta, Manila or Singapore already possesses something that a digital-only player must spend heavily to construct: proximity to customers. The challenge is converting that proximity into operational capability.

A store has traditionally been optimized around a relatively straightforward sequence—receive merchandise, display it, sell it and replenish it. In a unified commerce model, the same location can become something considerably more complex: a showroom, transaction point, customer-service centre, collection point and fulfilment node operating simultaneously.

The opportunity is therefore not simply to make stores "digital."

It is to make the physical network responsive to demand wherever that demand originates.

From Store Inventory to a Distributed Fulfilment Network

The difference between having inventory and having fulfilment capability is often technology. Consider a customer placing an order through a retailer's website. Several stores may technically have the product in stock. But which location should fulfil it? The answer cannot necessarily be the nearest store.

The optimal location may depend on inventory availability, the distance to the customer, the promised delivery window, fulfilment cost, store workload, the availability of staff to pick the order, and whether allocating that particular unit could compromise anticipated in-store demand. This is where Distributed Order Management (DOM) and [intelligent order orchestration](#) become strategically important. A modern orchestration layer can evaluate these variables continuously and determine where an order should be fulfilled. Instead of digital orders being sent to a single central warehouse by default, the retailer can dynamically identify an appropriate store, distribution centre or other fulfilment location. The resulting model supports capabilities such as ship-from-store, buy online and pick up in store (BOPIS), click-and-collect and endless-aisle ordering.

The significance extends beyond delivery speed.

When the right order is routed to the right location, retailers can potentially reduce unnecessary last-mile distance, improve inventory utilization and extract more commercial value from merchandise already positioned within the urban retail network. The store, in other words, becomes part of the retailer's supply chain without ceasing to be a store.

India and Southeast Asia Require Different Playbooks

There is no single APAC quick-commerce model.

India has developed one of the region's most aggressive rapid-delivery ecosystems, with purpose-built dark stores and increasingly sophisticated urban fulfilment infrastructure. Amazon, for instance, announced in June 2026 plans for more than 100 Urban Fulfillment Centers in India, expanding the selection available through Amazon Now beyond traditional quick-commerce categories and bringing inventory closer to customers.

For established retailers, this creates a different competitive question: if digital platforms can put more inventory close to consumers, can traditional retail networks use their own physical footprint to provide similar proximity?

In Southeast Asia, the answer may be even more dependent on existing retail infrastructure. Indonesia's highly distributed retail landscape, the Philippines' dense urban corridors and Singapore's compact, digitally mature environment all present different fulfilment economics. Momentum Works notes that country-level retail structures and consumer behaviour differ significantly across Southeast Asia, making a single regional quick-commerce playbook difficult to apply.

For retailers operating across these markets, the implication is clear: technology must support localization without creating a separate technology stack for every country.

The Hidden Problem: Inventory Confidence

Speed attracts consumers. Inventory accuracy determines whether speed can be delivered profitably. One of the most persistent obstacles to store-based fulfilment is the gap between inventory that exists in a system and inventory that can actually be promised to a customer.

Retailers that have grown through multiple waves of technology investment often operate a collection of systems: point-of-sale platforms in stores, e-commerce engines, warehouse systems, marketplace integrations, customer applications and other specialized tools. When these systems do not share inventory information in real time, the retailer can display a product online that appears available but is physically unavailable, misplaced, already reserved or otherwise unsuitable for fulfilment.

The result is the phenomenon consumers experience as an apparently simple failed promise: an order is accepted and later cancelled. For the retailer, the consequences are more serious. Repeated cancellations create customer dissatisfaction, additional service costs, wasted fulfilment effort and potential margin erosion.

A store-based fulfilment model therefore depends on a common inventory truth across stores, warehouses and digital channels. That is one of the foundational principles behind unified commerce.

Making the Store Operationally Intelligent

For store-based micro-fulfilment to work at enterprise scale, retailers also need to rethink how store employees interact with digital orders. An order arriving at a store cannot simply become another task added to an already busy associate's workload. The technology must help identify the order, locate the merchandise, determine an efficient picking path, reserve the inventory, prepare the shipment or collection and update the customer and enterprise systems without unnecessary manual intervention.

This is where unified inventory, order management, warehouse management and store operations begin to converge.

ETP Group's unified commerce architecture is designed around this convergence. Its flagship ETP Unify platform, together with its OMS capabilities and Ordazzle e-commerce management suite, brings together transactional and operational data across physical and digital channels. Built on MACH principles—Microservices, API-first, Cloud-native and Headless—the architecture is intended to allow retailers to connect stores, warehouses and digital channels without treating each as an isolated operational environment.

For retailers pursuing distributed fulfilment, the value proposition is not simply "real-time inventory." It is the ability to turn inventory visibility into an executable decision. An order can be assessed against available stock, fulfilment options and routing rules, enabling the retailer to determine how and where that order should be completed. That distinction is increasingly important as retailers move from omni-channel presence toward genuinely unified commerce.

The Margin Question Behind the Speed Race

There is another reason this shift matters: quick commerce has made speed highly visible, but it has not eliminated the economics of fulfilment.

A retailer can promise faster delivery and still lose money on every order if the cost of picking, packing, routing and delivering that order exceeds the contribution margin generated by the basket. This is particularly important in price-sensitive Asian markets.

Pricing and demand density as important constraints for Southeast Asian quick commerce, suggesting that fulfilment infrastructure alone does not guarantee mass-market adoption.

For established retailers, existing stores can potentially change that equation.

The objective is not to imitate every element of the dark-store model. It is to use assets that already exist—retail space, inventory, employees and customer proximity—in a more integrated way. That can make the physical network part of a broader fulfilment strategy rather than a cost centre operating independently from digital commerce. The most sophisticated retailers may ultimately view their store estate not according to a simple store-versus-warehouse distinction, but as a flexible network in which every location can perform different commercial roles depending on demand.

Unified Commerce Becomes the Operating Layer

This is ultimately why the quick-commerce conversation is evolving beyond logistics. The central challenge is not merely moving products faster. It is coordinating commerce faster. An order can begin on a mobile device, be paid for through a digital channel, be allocated against inventory in a physical store, picked by a store associate, handed to a third-party logistics provider and ultimately reconciled through the retailer's financial and compliance systems.

From the customer's perspective, this should look like one transaction. Behind the scenes, however, it requires multiple systems to behave as one operating environment. ETP Group sees this convergence as a central requirement for modern retail. ETP Unify brings together capabilities spanning unified inventory, order management, POS, CRM, promotions, product information and fulfilment, while Ordazzle provides e-commerce and marketplace management capabilities. The objective is to create a common operational foundation through which retailers can manage demand across channels rather than building isolated responses to every new digital touchpoint.

As Naresh Ahuja, Chairman & CEO, ETP Group, puts it:

“The next battle in quick commerce will not simply be about who can deliver fastest. It will be about who can deliver fastest without destroying the economics of the order. Retailers across Asia already possess an enormous competitive asset in their physical store networks. The opportunity is to connect those stores intelligently to digital demand, so proximity becomes a fulfilment advantage rather than simply a real-estate advantage.”

Compliance Cannot Be An Afterthought

The more distributed the retail operation becomes, the more complex its governance can become.

A digital order fulfilled from a store is still a retail transaction subject to the applicable fiscal, payment and reporting requirements of the market in which it occurs. For retailers operating across Southeast Asia, this creates additional complexity around localized taxation, invoicing,

government reporting and mall or landlord systems. In the Philippines, for example, ETP's source material identifies native BIR accreditation within its retail solutions, supporting compliant transaction and e-invoicing processes.

The wider lesson is that fulfilment architecture cannot be separated from enterprise architecture. A retailer may be able to create a technically impressive rapid-delivery experience, but if transactions require extensive manual reconciliation or introduce compliance risk, the model becomes difficult to scale.

Security is similarly fundamental. ETP states that its enterprise environments and solutions maintain certifications including ISO 27001, SOC 1 Type 2, [SOC 2 Type 2](#), PCI DSS v4.0.1 and PCI SSF v1.2. These credentials become increasingly relevant as stores connect to mobile devices, delivery platforms, APIs and other external endpoints.

The Store's Second Life

The evolution of quick commerce is therefore creating an unexpected opportunity for traditional retailers.

The physical store, once challenged by digital commerce, may become one of the most important pieces of digital fulfilment infrastructure. But this does not mean every store should become a miniature warehouse. Nor does it mean retailers should blindly chase 10-minute or 30-minute delivery promises.

The strategic opportunity is more nuanced.

Retailers need to determine where proximity creates economic value, which inventory should be distributed across which locations, what fulfilment promises each location can realistically support, and how technology can coordinate those decisions in real time. That requires an operating model in which inventory, orders, customers, stores and fulfilment are connected rather than managed as separate domains.

For APAC retailers, the implications are particularly significant because the region combines some of the world's fastest-growing digital commerce markets with dense physical retail networks and highly varied local operating environments.

The winners may not necessarily be those with the largest number of dark stores. They may be the retailers that learn how to make their existing stores work harder.

The competitive advantage of the next retail era could therefore be hiding in plain sight: thousands of physical locations, already stocked, already staffed and already positioned close to customers.

Unified commerce provides the connective tissue that can turn those locations into a coordinated fulfilment network.

And as quick commerce expands beyond groceries into increasingly valuable categories, that ability to bring inventory closer to the customer—while maintaining visibility, control and margin

discipline—could become one of the defining capabilities of the APAC retail enterprise.

About ETP Group

ETP (operating as ETP Group and ETP International) is a leading Unified Commerce Retail Technology Partner providing cloud-native POS, SaaS, OMS and e-commerce software solutions to prominent retailers across Asia Pacific, India and the Middle East. With nearly four decades of domain expertise, ETP powers operations for over 500 brands across 17 countries, helping clients manage over US\$10 billion in merchandise transactions.

ETP's cloud-native, AI-powered platforms include POS, CRM, OMS, PIM, WMS, unified inventory, promotions, loyalty, order orchestration and marketplace integrations. Underscoring its commitment to operational resilience and security, ETP holds global certifications including ISO 27001, SOC 1 Type 2, SOC 2 Type 2, PCI DSS v4.0.1 and PCI SSF v1.2.

To learn more about ETP Group's unified commerce solutions, visit www.etpgroup.com.

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