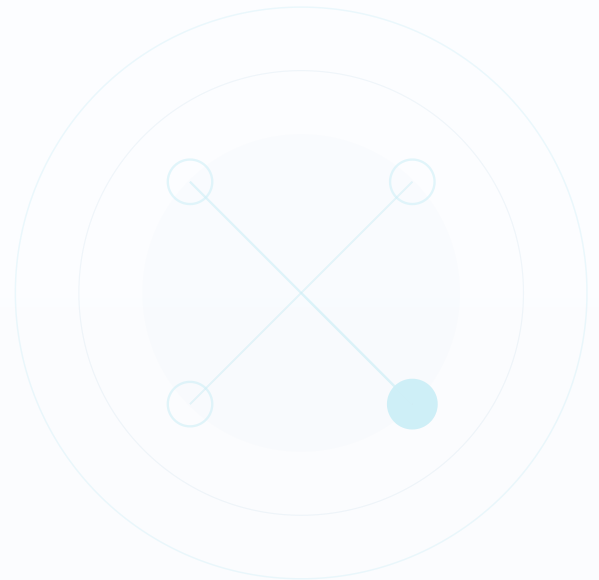


Sales order intake in the packaging industry

Why 80% of orders are still *typed by hand* — and what is changing right now.

Insights from a series of in-depth interviews with sales-operations leads, managing directors and SAP owners across the DACH packaging industry.



70%+

Orders via email with PDF

5–60 Min

Effort per manually keyed order

80%

Volume from top 50 customers

3–28k

Orders / year — interviewee range

WHAT WE LOOKED AT

Guided interviews paired with *operational deep dives*

Eight focus areas per conversation — from current-state process through inbound channels and volume to the ideal solution picture. The range spans from an SME with 3,000 orders to a global enterprise with 28,000 orders per year.



FINDINGS

Five patterns we found in *every single interview*

Regardless of company size, location or ERP system, the same five patterns repeat.

70%+ EMAIL · PDF

01

Email with PDF dominates — EDI remains the exception

Across every conversation, the share of orders arriving by email lands between 70% and well above. Phone still matters up to 25% in the SME mix, while EDI typically only covers a handful of major accounts.

Pharma sales ops: EDI only with 4-5 out of 350-400 active customers — top 50 = 80% of volume.

5 – 60 MIN / ORDER

02

Manual entry costs 10 to 60 minutes per order

Standard order, unchanged item: 5-10 min per line. With all checks, master data and filing: 10-20 min. More complex orders with version checks and price clarification: up to a full hour.

Scaling becomes a pure headcount question — doubling volume is "simply not feasible from a resource standpoint".

3 + 1 USE CASES

03

Three (actually four) use cases — the same everywhere

Orders almost always fall into the same categories — unchanged reprint, revised version, new SKU, and contract / call-off.

Pharma converter: 14,000-15,000 orders per year are "unchanged reprints".

FINDINGS · CONTINUED

The real complexity is in *mapping* — not in the PDF

Master data

04

The real complexity is not in the PDF — it is in the master data mapping

Customers order with their own material number, not the internal one. The same customer material number can even be reused across different customers — the actual work is mapping it onto the internal print image, plant and ship-to.

This is exactly where classic, template-based solutions fail — and where LLM-based IDP platforms shine.

3 / 3 ERP MIGRATIONS

05

A new ERP does not solve the problem

Three interviewed companies are currently in an ERP migration. In none of those projects is intelligent processing of inbound PDF orders part of the standard scope.

Several interviewees deliberately set up sales-order intake as a second, standalone project after ERP go-live.



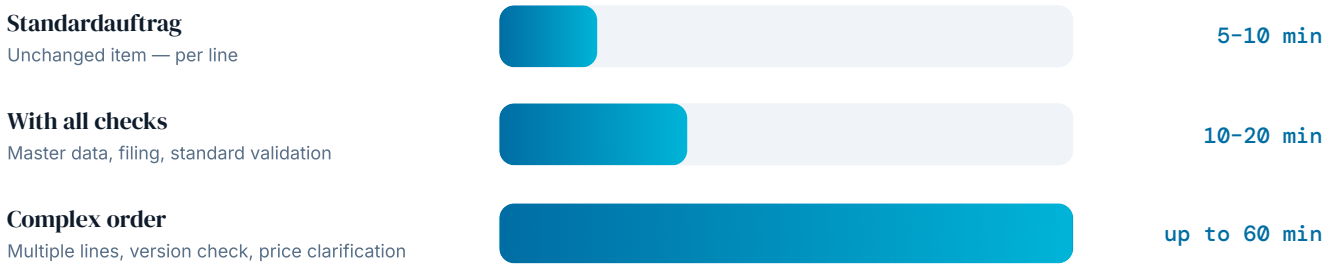
That would simply not be feasible from a resource standpoint. Processing is one thing — actually working through them is a second problem.

HEAD OF ORDER PROCESSING · SWISS PACKAGING COMPANY

EFFORT PER ORDER

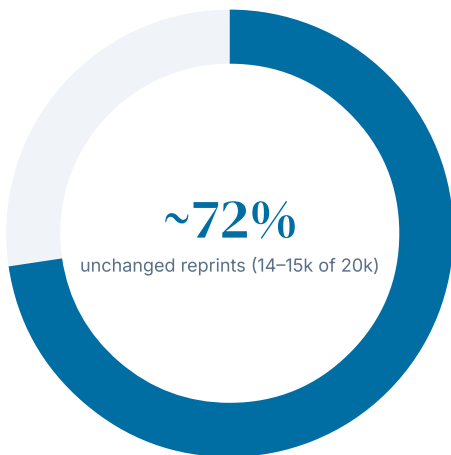
5 minutes or a full *hour*? Both — depending on the order type.

The effort figures from the interviews are remarkably consistent across all participants.



USE-CASE DISTRIBUTION

Four order types — three of them *already automatable today*



- Unchanged reprint**
Item and print image stay the same. Largest volume share, perfect for automation.
- Revised version**
Existing item with a new logo, spec or print-data revision. Pre-press review must be looped in.
- New SKU**
Completely new item. Master data, print files and plant scheduling have to be set up first.
- Contracts & call-offs**
Pre-produced quantities on fixed delivery cycles. Highly consistent, highly automatable.

DEEP DIVE

A pharma converter in the *DACH* region

Representative of a whole class of similar cases: an international folding-carton manufacturer with a strong pharma focus, whose process we walked through in three back-to-back sessions.

<p>26 <i>people</i></p> <p>in pharma sales operations</p>	<p>16 <i>of them</i></p> <p>working directly in order entry</p>	<p>28k <i>/year</i></p> <p>orders incl. new plant (20k + 8k)</p>	<p>4–5 <i>on EDI</i></p> <p>of 350–400 active customers</p>
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It cannot be the goal to bring even more typing work in. We want to focus on customer advice and communication — that has to be the main business.

ABTEILUNGSLEITER IN PHARMA SALES OPERATIONS

TARGET STATE – DEFINED TOGETHER

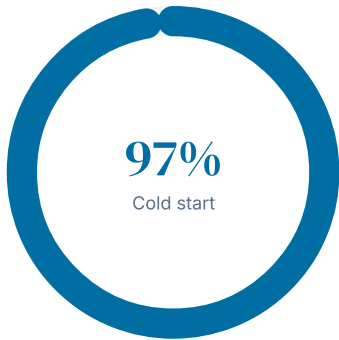
Three phases from *happy path* to edge case

<p>1</p> <p>PHASE 1 – HAPPY PATH</p> <p>Unchanged reprints fully automated</p> <p>Extract, validate against SAP master data and create the sales order directly via API — exactly like the existing EDI flow.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>PHASE 2 – EDGE CASES</p> <p>Pre-filled, with human in the loop</p> <p>Version changes and new SKUs are pre-filled as far as possible. The agent validates the open points and approves.</p>	<p>×</p> <p>DELIBERATELY OUT OF SCOPE</p> <p>Prices — only once the source is fixed</p> <p>As long as price lists live decentrally in Excel and SharePoint structures, AI cannot fix this.</p>
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WHAT WE DEMONSTRATED TECHNICALLY

97% on first contact — 99%+ from the third order.

In the live demo we worked with real orders from day-to-day operations. Per data point — material number, delivery date, quantity, ship-to — individual thresholds can be configured.



On first contact, no training

On the very first order in a given layout — measured on the field level.



Realistic from the second run on

Once the layout has been seen two or three times — configurable thresholds per data point.

VOICES FROM THE INTERVIEWS

Comparing the material number — that is the indispensable data point. It is also the first check we run.

Head of Sales Operations
Pharma packaging specialist

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR OTHERS

Three decisions *most converters* end up making

Most packaging companies we speak with end up making three very similar decisions.

FIRST**Sales-order intake as *its own project***

Not bolted onto the ERP programme. The leverage is too large and too specific for a standard module.

SECOND**Start with the *top 20–50 customers***

They typically carry 70–80% of volume. Edge cases are deferred on purpose.

THIRD**More *advisory time* — not less headcount**

Competitive pressure (including from Asia) comes from service, not from typing.

Also active in packaging? Share your *experience*.

The market study is ongoing. If you want to honestly assess your sales-order intake or see how it compares — get in touch.

[Get in touch](#)

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