

# Gift wrap or tape in 1 hour: How Amazon aids procrastinators

December 24 2017, by Joseph Pisani

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In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a clerk picks an item from a shelf and scans it with a hand-held device to fill a customer order at the Amazon Prime warehouse in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

With five days until Christmas, someone in New York urgently needed 10 rolls of wrapping paper. Another person needed a bag of potatoes and aluminum foil baking pans. And someone needed six rolls of Scotch tape, 100 blank envelopes, and 240 dog poop bags—in different colors.

Even after online shipping deadlines have passed, holiday procrastinators in more than 30 cities who have already paid for Amazon's \$99-a-year Prime membership can order this weekend to get gifts, food or decorations in two hours—or even one, for an extra fee. The minimum order is \$30.

There's no shortage of late shoppers. More people are waiting until the last minute to shop, according to research by GlobalData Retail, which found that fewer shoppers had finished buying gifts for adults in the last week before Christmas this year than in the previous two years. Prime Now delivers all year long, but the holiday season is the busiest. Amazon.com Inc. says Dec. 23 last year was the biggest day for Prime Now in its three-year history, although it wouldn't provide numbers.

Its workers will be delivering until 11:59 p.m. on Christmas Eve.

How does it happen? Unlike at the enormous warehouses that ship and box orders from Amazon.com's main site, there are no robots or conveyor belts. Instead, workers at a Prime Now facility grab a cart and pull items from shelves quickly. The selection is smaller at Prime Now, with tens of thousands of items available, compared to the hundreds of millions of items on Amazon.com.



In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, Amazon Prime Now bags are ready for delivery, at the Amazon warehouse in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

Here's a look inside the maze of the three-story Prime Now facility across the street from the Empire State Building.

## LABYRINTH OF GOODS

At first glance, the shelves can look like a disorganized mess of mismatched goods.

That's because when inventory comes in, items of all kinds are stocked on shelves that are broken into squares and rectangles with bright yellow dividers. One cubby, for example, had Calvin Klein boxers, a Rubik's Cube, Viva paper towels and Amazon's voice-activated device Echo Dot.



In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a clerk rolls a cart full of customer orders while a bicyclist with a backpack of orders prepares to leave the Amazon Prime warehouse, in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

The system saves workers from spending a lot of time storing and organizing items. Amazon's technology knows exactly where every item sits, and tells the dozens of workers who collect items where to find them in the aisles.

"It's beautiful chaos," says Stephenie Landry, Prime Now's vice president.

**ORDER'S HERE!**

When a shopper places an order through the Prime Now app or site, it is



sent to a hand-held scanner that the workers in the facility hold.



In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a bicyclist with a backpack and basket of customer orders prepares to make deliveries for Amazon Prime Now, in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

The employee, pushing a multi-level cart, gets to work. Because Amazon's technology knows the size and weight of each item, the scanner will tell a worker how many bags will be needed. Brown paper bags, rather than boxes, are how Prime Now items get delivered.

The scanner also shows the [worker](#) the fastest way to navigate the aisles of goods. Speed is critical—Amazon representatives asked an AP reporter and photographer to stand out of the way so as not to slow down the cart-pushing workers.

## PROTECTING THE POTATO CHIP

But there's method in it. The aisles are arranged so that heavy items are placed in bags first. Delicate items, such as potato chips, sliced bread and tortillas, are in the last aisle before the order is sent out for delivery so they're not crushed by cans of tomato sauce or bottles of sparkling water.



In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a clerk fills a customer order at the Amazon Prime warehouse, in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

## TIME TO TAKE OFF

When the picker finishes up the orders, sticky labels with the customer's name and address are printed out from a machine and stuck on the bags.

The brown paper bags are sealed and then placed on tall racks to be delivered by someone else. The delivery person either drives, walks, bikes or takes mass transit to get the order out, depending on the city.

Besides the U.S. locations, Prime Now operates in some international cities, such as London, Milan and Tokyo. New York was the first city to get the service in 2014, says Landry, and a way to test if the concept could work elsewhere.

"If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere," she says.



In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a clerk reaches to pick an item for a customer order at the Amazon Prime warehouse, in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)





In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a clerk reaches to a shelf to pick an item for a customer order at the Amazon Prime warehouse, in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)





In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, Prime Now customer orders are ready for delivery at the Amazon warehouse in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)



In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a delivery man carries a customer order as he leaves the Amazon Prime warehouse in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)



In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a delivery man carries customer orders as he leaves the Amazon Prime warehouse in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)



In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, a variety of items are stocked on shelves at the Amazon Prime warehouse in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)





In this Wednesday, Dec. 20, 2017, photo, the Amazon Echo Dot is stocked on a shelf alongside jars of Garlic Chili Sauce at the Amazon Prime warehouse in New York. (AP Photo/Mark Lennihan)

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