

FREE PLAYBOOK · OPERATIONS SERIES · 2026 EDITION

Quick Commerce Operations Playbook

Dark store setup, slotting logic, UPH benchmarks, and common failure modes in 10-minute delivery.

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Introduction

Quick commerce is the most operationally demanding business model in retail. 10-minute delivery leaves no room for the small inefficiencies that eCommerce can tolerate. This playbook distils what I learned running ops at Blinkit and Zepto into a practical guide for anyone building or scaling a quick commerce operation.

Part 1: Dark Store Setup

Site Selection

Location determines everything downstream. Get this wrong and no operational excellence can save you.

- Target 1.5-3 km delivery radius (rider return time drives economics)
- Ground floor with roller shutter access (fast rider dispatch)
- Minimum 1500-2500 sqft (assuming 3000-5000 SKU range)
- Access to consistent power (24-hour uninterrupted operation)
- Legal zoning as commercial or godown (not residential)

Layout Principles

Every dark store should optimise for one thing: minimising rider dwell time. The picker's walk path matters, but the rider's handover time matters more because riders are your unit economics constraint.

Slotting Logic

The Pareto principle applies brutally to grocery: 20% of SKUs drive 60% of orders. Slot accordingly:

- **A-class (top 20% by velocity):** eye-level, closest to dispatch
- **B-class (next 30%):** reachable racks, near A-class
- **C-class (bottom 50%):** back racks, higher/lower zones
- Fresh and perishables in dedicated zones with FEFO discipline

Part 2: Productivity — UPH Benchmarks

Category benchmarks for quick commerce dark stores:

CATEGORY	UPH TARGET	BEST-IN-CLASS
Grocery (ambient)	100-130	150+
Grocery (fresh)	70-100	120+
Non-food (top-up)	80-110	140+
Pharma/OTC	60-90	110+

If your UPH is below target consistently, the fix is rarely "hire faster pickers." It is almost always slotting, pick-path design, or SKU rationalisation.

Part 3: Rider Operations

Rider Productivity Metrics

- **Orders per hour per rider:** 3-5 target
- **Average trip time:** 12-18 minutes
- **Slot utilisation:** 70-85%
- **SLA compliance:** 95%+ delivered within promise time

Attrition Control

Rider attrition is the single largest hidden cost in quick commerce. Every 1% improvement in monthly attrition saves ~₹15-30 lakh annually for a 100-rider fleet. Focus on:

- Predictable earnings (transparent incentive structure)
- Fair slot allocation (no favouritism)
- Clean rider infrastructure (rest area, water, toilets)
- Weather protection (rain gear, uniform, hydration in summer)
- Regular one-on-ones with team leads

Part 4: Inventory Discipline

IRA (Inventory Record Accuracy)

For quick commerce, IRA below 98% causes visible customer pain — stockouts show up as cancelled orders and refunds. Recovery framework:

- Daily cycle counts for A-class SKUs
- Weekly cycle counts for B-class
- Monthly wall-to-wall for C-class
- Root-cause code every discrepancy (theft, damage, mis-scan, system error)
- Weekly IRA review with the operations team

Shrinkage

Grocery shrinkage should stay below 0.5% monthly. Above 1% and you have a systemic problem. Common root causes:

- Damaged goods not written off systematically
- Rider pilferage (rare but visible)
- Picker mis-picks that never come back
- Fresh spoilage from poor FEFO discipline
- Vendor short-supplies not caught at GRN

Part 5: Category & Margin Management

Operations excellence does not save a broken assortment. Category strategy matters:

- Track category margins weekly, not monthly
- Ruthlessly delist SKUs with low velocity and low margin
- Negotiate promotional support with high-velocity vendors
- Watch for private label opportunities in top 20% categories
- Use brand ads / sponsored listings to fund margin

Part 6: Common Failure Modes

Failure 1: "Just add more stores"

New stores rarely fix unit economics. If your stores are not profitable at density, they will not become profitable at scale.

Failure 2: "The riders are lazy"

Rider productivity is almost always a system problem — poor slot allocation, unclear routes, weak incentive design.

Failure 3: "Let us try 15-minute delivery"

Widening the promise window does not fix unit economics; it just makes them slightly less bad while destroying your brand differentiation.

Next Steps

Want a proper diagnostic on your quick commerce ops? Book a free discovery call to discuss where you can push productivity and margins.

READY TO GO FURTHER?

Book a Free Discovery Call

A 30-minute session to discuss your operations, AI adoption plans, or team training needs. No obligation. No sales pitch. Just useful conversation.

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