

## Is Your Planning Process Burning Out Your Best People?

### How to Move from Heroics and Burnout to a Modern, Empowered Planning Function

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Every retail leader recognizes the type: the "hero" planner. They are the ones who stay late, wrestling with dozens of spreadsheets to finalize the open-to-buy (OTB). They can build a forecast from scratch and somehow reconcile conflicting data from different departments. We celebrate their dedication, but it's time to ask a hard question: have our outdated processes forced them into this heroic, high-stress role?

When merchandise planners constantly battle manual workloads and fragmented data—all under immense pressure to make perfect calls in a volatile market—burnout isn't just a risk; it's an inevitability. This is more than a personnel issue; it's a direct threat to operational efficiency and profitability.

The good news is that this narrative can change. By strategically upgrading your business processes and tools, you can empower your team, reduce stress, and unlock new levels of performance. This guide will show you how to modernize your planning function.

**Step 1: Get Off the Manual Treadmill** The most significant drain on any planning team is the endless cycle of manual data tasks. Planners who spend their days exporting, copying, and pasting are not spending their time analyzing trends or finding growth opportunities. Ask yourself: how much of your team's week is lost to spreadsheets? Modern planning platforms eliminate this waste by automating data consolidation and handling complex calculations, giving your team back their most valuable resource: time. This shift can reduce time spent on manual forecasting and ordering by up to 90%.

**Step 2: Create a Single Source of Truth** Decisions are only as good as the data they're based on. When your team works from a single, unified platform, you eliminate the confusion and errors that come from disparate information. An integrated data architecture ensures seamless information flow, giving planners the complete picture they need to hit their targets. It ensures everyone—from merchandising to finance—is speaking the same language.

**Step 3: Build for Agility, Not Rigidity** Retail moves too fast for rigid, annual plans. Your team needs the flexibility to react to market shifts and make strategic adjustments on the fly. Empower them with the ability to model "what-if" scenarios instantly. *What happens to our inventory if this trend continues? How does a delayed shipment impact our OTB?* Answering these questions turns your team from reactive to proactive. Great systems enable top-down, bottom-up, and middle-out planning, allowing you to set a high-level goal and have it intelligently cascade to a granular level.

**Step 4: Unify Teams Around Common Goals** Planning cannot happen in a silo. A unified system fosters cross-functional collaboration and ensures every stakeholder is aligned with the core financial objectives. A central plan provides clear, actionable guidance for buyers, translating big financial numbers into intelligent, SKU-level decisions. This helps formalize OTB compliance and reduces the "inventory creep" that silently eats away at margins.

**Step 5: Master Your Inventory and Cash Flow** Effective inventory management is the heart of profitable retail. A comprehensive WSSI (Weekly Sales, Stock, and Intake) is the command center for your inventory, allowing you to manage stock effectively at any level. Equip your team with tools to track and optimize for key metrics like weeks of supply, turn, and GMROI. This allows them to set precise inventory targets to avoid both overstocks and stockouts.



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**Step 6: Harness the Power of Math and Analytics** A planner's intuition is essential, but it becomes unstoppable when amplified by machine learning. Algorithm-powered sales forecasting can achieve up to 99% accuracy, drastically reducing stockouts. Advanced analytics can reveal powerful insights into category performance, customer demand, and even price elasticity, supporting smarter strategic moves.

**Step 7: Invest in Expertise and Partnership** A tool is only as powerful as the team using it. When you adopt new technology, look for a provider with deep, real-world implementation experience. The right partner brings the thought leadership and training necessary to help your team embrace not just new processes, but a new, more strategic way of thinking.



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## From Burnout to Business Growth: The Financial Imperative

As executives, we evaluate initiatives based on their return on investment. Addressing planner stress isn't a "soft" HR goal; it is a strategic imperative with a direct and measurable impact on the P&L.

- **Reduced Employee Turnover Costs:** Burnout is a primary driver of turnover. Retaining top talent by providing them with the right tools delivers immediate savings and preserves invaluable institutional knowledge.
- **Improved Inventory ROI:** A supported, strategic planner leads directly to more productive inventory, higher turn, and improved GMROI—freeing up working capital for growth.
- **Protected Gross Margins:** Empowering your planners with data-driven tools is one of the most effective forms of margin protection you can implement, preventing the costly errors that lead to excessive markdowns and lost sales.

By taking these steps, you can create an environment where planners are not just surviving, but thriving. You'll reduce burnout and empower your team to become the strategic engine that drives your business forward.

### About ANT USA

*Since 1992, ANT USA has focused on solving real-world retail planning challenges. Our flagship Buyer's Toolbox AP software is a testament to this practical, results-driven approach, helping retailers around the world modernize their planning, achieve real-world forecast accuracy, and drive tangible profit growth.*

*We provide the tools and the expert partnership to help you transform your Merchandise Financial Planning (MFP) and Open-to-Buy (OTB) processes.*

*Ready to empower your planners?*

*Visit [www.antusa.com](http://www.antusa.com) to learn how our solutions can help you reduce markdowns, optimize inventory, and improve gross margins.*