



# AOP Pre-Planning & Cross-Functional Readiness Checklist



## Build a Stronger Foundation Before Planning Begins

The success of the Annual Operating Plan (AOP) is often determined long before formal planning begins. Consumer package goods companies that invest in structured pre-planning are better equipped to align teams, validate assumptions, identify risks early, and build more accurate and adaptable plans.

**This checklist will help collaborative cross-functional teams assess readiness during the pre-planning phase of the AOP cycle. It provides a practical framework for evaluating data quality, organizational alignment, forecasting confidence, investment effectiveness, operational constraints, and decision-making readiness.**



ALIGNED TEAMS



BETTER DECISIONS



REDUCED RISK



PROFITABLE GROWTH



## SECTION 1

# Strategic Alignment Readiness

Ensure all teams understand and align to enterprise priorities before commencing detailed planning.

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Have executive growth strategies been clearly communicated?			
Are revenue, margin, and market share targets aligned across functions?			
Have strategic priorities been translated into measurable business objectives?			
Are teams aligned on key business risks and market assumptions?			
Have planning guardrails and investment thresholds been established?			

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Which assumptions are most likely to change during the fiscal year?
- Which objectives may create conflict across teams?
- Where do we anticipate execution risk?



SECTION 2

# Historical Performance & Variance Review

Identify what drove prior-year performance and uncover gaps between plan and execution.

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Has prior-year performance vs plan been reviewed?			
Have major drivers of over- and underperformance been identified?			
Has promotion ROI been analyzed at the customer or event level?			
Have forecast accuracy trends been reviewed?			
Have lessons learned been documented and shared cross-functionally?			

## KEY METRICS TO REVIEW

- Forecast accuracy
- Promotion ROI
- Gross-to-net variance
- Revenue vs. plan
- Margin vs. plan
- Inventory turns
- Service levels



### SECTION 3

## Data & Systems Readiness

Evaluate whether teams are working from consistent, reliable, and connected data sources.

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Do teams operate from a shared source of truth (reports, dashboards)?			
Are ERP, TPM, CRM, and planning systems connected?			
Are key datasets complete and validated?			
Are there known reporting inconsistencies between departments?			
Is promotion and profitability data available at a merch condition or tactic level?			

### RISK INDICATORS

- Multiple versions of the same report
- Manual reconciliation processes
- Delayed reporting cycles
- Lack of customer-level profitability visibility
- Inconsistent KPI definitions



## SECTION 4

# Demand Planning Readiness

Assess confidence in demand assumptions and forecasting capabilities.

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Has baseline demand been validated?			
Have external demand signals been incorporated?			
Are new product forecasts supported by data or comparable launches?			
Have upside/downside demand scenarios been modeled to prepare for possible volatility in revenue and inventory outcomes?			

### DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Which demand assumptions carry the highest risk?
- Which customers or categories show the highest forecast volatility?
- Where do we lack sufficient visibility into downstream demand?



SECTION 5

# Trade & Marketing Investment Assessment

Evaluate whether trade and marketing investments are aligned to growth and profitability goals.

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Has promotion effectiveness been measured consistently?			
Are underperforming trade activities clearly identified?			
Have ROI benchmarks been established by customer or promotion type?			
Can investment scenarios be modeled before committing spend?			
Is there a process for reallocating spend during the year?			

## DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Which investments generate the strongest incremental return?
- Which programs persist due to history rather than performance?
- How quickly can investment decisions be adjusted?



## SECTION 6

# Supply Chain & Operational Alignment

Identify operational constraints and execution risks before plans are finalized.

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Have production constraints been identified?			
Are lead times and inventory assumptions current?			
Have supply disruption scenarios been reviewed?			
Are service level expectations aligned with commercial plans?			
Can operations support projected promotional activity?			

### DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- Which SKUs or categories face the greatest supply risk?
- Where are inventory levels misaligned with demand expectations?
- What operational bottlenecks could threaten execution?



## SECTION 7

# Governance, Incentives, & Decision-Making

Ensure teams are aligned on accountability, escalation paths, and shared outcomes

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Are planning roles and reliability clearly defined?			
Are KPIs aligned across functions?			
Are escalation paths established for unresolved planning conflicts?			
Are decisions supported by shared data and metrics?			
Is profitable growth prioritized over siloed functional goals?			

### WARNING SIGNS

- Conflicting KPIs across teams
- Repeated late-stage plan revisions
- Excessive manual approval loops
- Lack of ownership clarity
- Slow decision-making cycles



SECTION 8

# Scenario Planning Readiness

Determine whether the organization can model and respond to uncertainty effectively.

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Have base case, upside, and downside plan scenarios been created to model potential revenue and inventory outcomes?			
Can teams model customer-specific or regional scenarios?			
Are pricing and promotion impacts modeled dynamically?			
Can plans be updated quickly as conditions change?			
Are teams prepared to make rapid trade-off decisions?			



## SECTION 9

# Checkpoint Cadence & Continuous Planning

Establish a structured review rhythm to support continuous optimization.

QUESTION	YES	NO	FOLLOW-UP
Has a monthly performance review cadence been established?			
Are quarterly reforecasting processes defined?			
Are exception-based alerts configured for underperformance?			
Is promotion ROI monitored continuously?			
Can teams act quickly on emerging performance signals?			

### DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- How quickly can the organization identify performance gaps?
- How quickly can decisions be made once gaps are identified?
- Which planning activities remain too manual or slow?



## You're Ready to Begin the Annual Operating Plan Process

Modern AOP success depends on more than building an accurate annual plan. Teams must work together to create an organization capable of adapting quickly as conditions change

Organizations that establish strong pre-planning disciplines, connected data foundations, aligned incentives, and continuous optimization capabilities are better positioned to improve forecast accuracy, accelerate decisions, and drive more profitable growth throughout the year.

## Find Out More

Get all of our guidance on modern annual planning when you read the blog and download the detailed eBook.

[Blog →](#)

### Turn Your Consumer Products Annual Operating Plan into a Continuous Growth Engine

Many organizations want to know how to improve and streamline the annual operating plan process without adding more complexity or time.

The solution requires rethinking how planning is designed and executed.

[eBook →](#)

### Turn Your Annual Operating Plan into a Continuous Growth Engine

Your annual operating plan (AOP) is outdated before the ink is dry.

Discover a modern framework built on connected planning, advanced analytics, and closed-loop optimization that aligns strategy, sales, finance, and supply chain.

## How Vistex Adds Value

Consumer product manufacturers rely upon promotional events with multiple overlapping merchandising conditions to gain category share and partner with retailers and distributors to achieve volume or growth objectives.

Vistex provides an integrated, end-to-end trade promotion management solution optimized for account planning, settlements, scanbacks, rebates, contracts, pricing strategies, co-op, budgeting, customer loyalty rewards programs, commissions, and brokerage fees.

Vistex centralizes these business processes to enable CPG manufacturers to make more profitable trade spend decisions and deliver their S&OP. With the ability to evaluate performance and ROI, consumer products manufacturers are able to take analysis to the next level with KPIs and even integrate POS data to effectively evaluate promotional efficiency and enhance revenue growth management.

## About Vistex<sup>®</sup>

Vistex solutions help businesses take control of their mission-critical processes. With a multitude of programs covering pricing, trade, royalties and incentives, it can be complicated to see where all the money is flowing, let alone how much difference it makes to the topline and the bottom line.

With Vistex, business stakeholders can see the numbers, see what really works, and see what to do next - so they can make sure every dollar spent or earned is really driving growth, and not just additional costs. The world's leading enterprises across a spectrum of industries rely on Vistex every day to propel their businesses.

[info@vistex.com](mailto:info@vistex.com) | [www.vistex.com](http://www.vistex.com)



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