Delivery schedule call-off: managing recurring demand with call-off orders

The delivery schedule call-off is a proven operational procurement instrument in which contractually agreed quantities are called off over defined periods through concrete call-offs. Instead of creating individual purchase orders for every delivery, the buyer calls off the actually required quantities with specified delivery dates from a scheduling agreement. For technical buyers in DACH industry, this method significantly reduces administrative effort and creates planning certainty for both parties.

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Key facts at a glance

01 The delivery schedule call-off is based on a framework agreement or scheduling agreement from which specific quantities and dates are called off.

02 Tiered call-offs are common, with firm quantities for short-term periods and forecast quantities for longer periods.

03 Key requirements include call-off deadlines, firm quantity windows, tolerance rules and defined units of measure.

04 Clear exception and escalation processes within exception management prevent delivery delays and additional costs.

05 KPIs such as call-off accuracy, delivery reliability and inventory coverage drive continuous improvement.

Definition: delivery schedule call-off

The delivery schedule call-off refers to the process in which a buyer bindingly requests individual delivery quantities and dates through call-offs from a long-term scheduling agreement or framework agreement. The basis is an agreement previously negotiated on products, prices, terms and quantity corridors. The actual call-off triggers the delivery obligation and replaces the classic individual purchase

order.

Distinction from individual planning

With individual planning, a separate purchase order is created for each requirement, each with its own review and approval. The delivery schedule call-off shifts negotiation to the contract level and decouples it from day-to-day call-offs. This significantly reduces process costs and procurement lead times, but requires robust demand planning. In practice, both methods are often combined: series parts are handled via delivery schedule call-offs, while individual parts and spare parts requirements are handled via classic purchase orders.

Scheduling agreement as the basis

A scheduling agreement typically defines items, prices, quantity corridors and delivery terms over twelve to 24 months. The call-off then concretises weekly, monthly or day-exact quantities depending on the agreement. The difference from a simple call-off order lies in the planning horizon: while the call-off order often covers only a single delivery, the delivery schedule call-off structures a continuous delivery process. It is important that the contractual framework and call-off logic are cleanly aligned.

Methods and approach for call-off control

In practice, a three-tier call-off model has proven itself, combining planning certainty and flexibility. The buyer regularly sends delivery schedule call-offs to the supplier, subdivided by quantity into time horizons.

Tiering of call-offs

Typically, three time zones are distinguished: the short-term horizon (usually one to four weeks) contains firm quantities that both parties are bound to observe. The medium-term horizon (three to six months) is treated as a strongly weighted target with limited adjustment options, often with defined tolerances of typically ten to twenty per cent. The long-term horizon contains forecast quantities for capacity planning and can be freely adjusted. This structure gives the supplier planning certainty for staffing, materials and machine utilisation.

Call-off deadlines and collection windows

The transmission frequency of call-offs, lead times for changes and permissible delivery windows must be defined. Weekly or fortnightly call-off cycles with lead times of typically several weeks to months are common. Palletisation and packaging requirements also belong in the agreement, as they influence direct collection and line feeding. For business-critical material, an Available to Promise (ATP) reconciliation is additionally recommended so that the supplier's capacity commitments remain transparent.

Digital transmission and processing

Today, delivery schedule call-offs are frequently transmitted as EDI messages, via supplier portals or

by API. A documented acknowledgement-of-receipt process is important so that the supplier can report date deviations in good time. Changes to ongoing call-offs require clearly regulated change processes with version history. This transparency considerably reduces disputes over quantity changes reported too late.

Key KPIs and control variables

Without reliable KPIs, call-off control remains blind. Practice focuses on a few but meaningful metrics that are regularly discussed in supplier reviews.

Call-off and delivery reliability

Call-off accuracy measures how much the quantities actually called off deviate from the forecasts; in practice, values above ninety per cent are considered sound. Delivery reliability (On-Time In-Full) checks whether the supplier delivers agreed quantities within the defined delivery window. Typical target values here frequently lie above 95 to 98 per cent. Both KPIs should be evaluated separately by plant and material class.

Inventory and process metrics

Inventory coverage at the buyer's end shows whether the call-off quantities match the actual consumption dynamics. Additionally relevant are ordering and process costs per call-off, the scrap and returns rate, and the number of open exception cases. Similar to a Gage R&R analysis in quality management, the principle applies: only when the measurement system itself is reliable are statements about process performance dependable. Data sources and counting methods for the KPIs should therefore be defined in a binding manner.

Review cycles and scores

Monthly operational reviews and quarterly supplier evaluations have proven effective, in which the KPIs are discussed jointly. In the case of persistent deviations, contractual reaction mechanisms should apply, such as an escalation clause with defined escalation levels. This keeps the call-off collaboration measurable and development-oriented rather than confrontational.

Risks and controls in delivery schedule call-offs

Despite its advantages, the method carries risks that can be managed through clear agreements and ongoing monitoring. Quantity- and date-related uncertainties as well as contractual gaps can be particularly costly.

Quantity risks and tolerance rules

The greatest risk is quantity deviation: if call-offs fall below agreed off-take quantities, a take-or-pay clause or minimum off-take quantity may apply; if they exceed capacity, surcharges or supply bottlenecks loom. Tolerance bands per horizon and defined adjustment rights usually resolve this

tension cleanly. For capacity-intensive parts, the contract should stipulate how short-term increases are compensated, for example via sourcing levers such as additional shifts or alternative manufacturing capacity.

Contractual safeguards

In addition to quantities and prices, firm quantity windows, change processes, packaging and palletisation requirements as well as liability allocations belong in the agreement. A product liability clause and clearly regulated reservations for in-house production by the buyer prevent later interpretation conflicts. With international suppliers, it is worthwhile to verify the company's identity before concluding the contract, for example via the D-U-N-S Number (DUNS). Legal detail questions, such as the validity of electronic call-offs as binding orders, should be reviewed legally on a case-by-case basis.

Exception management and escalation

Not every call-off runs as planned. Structured exception management defines which deviations are reported by whom, within which deadline and via which channel. This includes delivery delays by the supplier, call-off changes by the buyer, quality complaints and capacity bottlenecks. Every exception should have a deadline, a responsible person and a documented solution; only when this level fails does the contractual escalation apply.

Current developments and outlook

The delivery schedule call-off is noticeably changing due to digitalisation, resilience requirements and sustainability reporting. Those who modernise the method gain planning certainty and supplier loyalty at the same time.

Automation and AI-supported planning

Demand forecasts are increasingly generated in a data-driven manner from ERP and consumption data, meaning that call-offs are created automatically and only manually reviewed in exceptional cases. AI-supported forecasts can incorporate seasonal patterns and order cycle trends, but they do not replace professional plausibility checks of critical items. Automated call-offs free up buyers for value-adding tasks such as supplier sourcing or negotiation preparation.

Resilience and sustainability

Many companies supplement delivery schedule call-offs with resilience mechanisms such as secondary sources, safety stock for A-parts and pre-configured emergency call-offs. At the same time, sustainability data is gaining importance: for certain industries and products, a Product Carbon Footprint (PCF) is increasingly becoming part of the evaluation, sometimes also of the supplier agreement. These developments expand the classic call-off logic to include risk and impact dimensions.

Embedding in overarching processes

The delivery schedule call-off is the operational end piece of a process chain that begins with the requirement specification, leads via Source-to-Contract (S2C) to the framework agreement and culminates in ongoing call-off control. Anyone who designs this chain consistently avoids contradictions between contract logic and day-to-day planning. The call-off also affects working capital management: date-compliant call-offs stabilise inventories and thus capital commitment.

Typical metrics

Metric	Typical value
Call-off accuracy	> 90% *Deviation of call-offs from the forecast; sound practice values lie above this*
Delivery reliability (OTIF)	> 95–98% *On-Time In-Full within the defined delivery window*
Exception rate	< 5% *Proportion of call-offs with deviation notification; depends on volatility*
Inventory coverage	1–4 weeks *Depending on strategy, plant structure and material criticality*

Practical example

A medium-sized mechanical engineering company previously procured critical series parts via hundreds of individual purchase orders per year. After switching to delivery schedule call-offs with a scheduling agreement, weekly call-off cycles and firm quantities over four weeks, the administrative effort noticeably decreased and delivery reliability continuously improved in the period that followed. Decisive factors were a clean exception management process with defined notification deadlines and a monthly review of call-off accuracy together with the supplier.

- Scheduling agreement over 18 months with a firm quantity horizon of four weeks and a tolerance band in the medium-term horizon
- Weekly call-off transmission via EDI with automated acknowledgement of receipt
- Monthly KPI review of call-off accuracy, delivery reliability and inventory coverage
- Defined three-stage escalation process for date and quantity deviations

Conclusion

The delivery schedule call-off is the central instrument for handling recurring series demand efficiently and in a plannable manner. Its success depends less on the form of the call-off than on the quality of

the underlying framework agreement and the discipline in exception management. Clear horizons, tolerance rules and measurable KPIs create planning certainty on both sides. Digitalisation further reduces process effort, but does not change the need for robust agreements. Those who design the scheduling agreement, call-off logic and KPIs as one unit reduce costs and sustainably increase supply security.

Frequently asked questions

? What is a delivery schedule call-off?

A delivery schedule call-off is the binding request for specific quantities and delivery dates from a scheduling agreement or framework agreement. It replaces individual purchase orders for recurring series parts. The framework governs prices and terms, while the call-off triggers the actual delivery.

? What is the difference between a call-off order and a delivery schedule call-off?

A call-off order is usually a single, concretised delivery requirement. The delivery schedule call-off structures the entire delivery process over a period, often with firm, target and forecast quantities per horizon. In practice, the delivery schedule call-off continuously encompasses individual call-off orders.

? What deadlines apply to delivery schedule call-offs?

This depends on the agreement; typical call-off cycles are weekly or fortnightly with lead times of several weeks. The short-term horizon with firm quantities frequently covers one to four weeks. Change deadlines for firm quantities are agreed individually in the framework agreement.

? Which KPIs are relevant for delivery schedule call-offs?

Key metrics are call-off accuracy (deviation between call-off and forecast), delivery reliability (On-Time In-Full) and inventory coverage. In addition, process costs per call-off and open exception cases are considered. A binding definition of the measurement methodology is important for both parties.

? Is a delivery schedule call-off legally binding?

Firm quantities and dates in the short-term horizon are generally binding, while forecast quantities remain non-binding. The precise contractual design, such as tolerance rules and acceptance obligations, determines the binding nature. Individual questions should be reviewed legally.

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