



UPPER INDUSTRY REPORT • LIGHT INDUSTRIAL TALENT

The Light Industrial Talent Market in 2026.

How AI-accelerated, always-on sourcing wins high-volume warehouse and fulfillment roles — a data-driven field guide for light industrial staffing leaders.

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10 minutes

SOURCES

16 cited (2019–2026)

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KEY FINDINGS

35–49%	annual turnover in warehouse and fulfillment roles, per BLS JOLTS data. ¹
9–10 wks	average temp/contract assignment tenure — the position is functionally always being refilled. ⁴
86%	more likely staffing firms using AI screening are to place candidates in under 20 days. ⁵
~50%	of all 2025 seasonal retail hiring volume concentrated in a single employer (Amazon's 250,000 hires). ²
50–65%	of total warehouse operating cost is labor — making wage competition the biggest controllable line item. ³

01 — The Demand

Why does light industrial hiring never really stop?

Because turnover isn't a fixable bug in this market — it's the permanent operating condition.

Light industrial roles are defined by structurally high churn: physically demanding, often lower-wage, and frequently short-tenure by design. **Warehouse and fulfillment turnover consistently runs 35–49% annually**, according to BLS JOLTS data for Transportation, Warehousing, and Utilities.¹ Some individual facilities exceed 100% annual turnover.⁶ Average temp and contract assignment tenure is only **9–10 weeks** — a staffing provider or in-house TA function is functionally always recruiting.⁴

Warehouse and fulfillment turnover runs 35–49% annually across segments



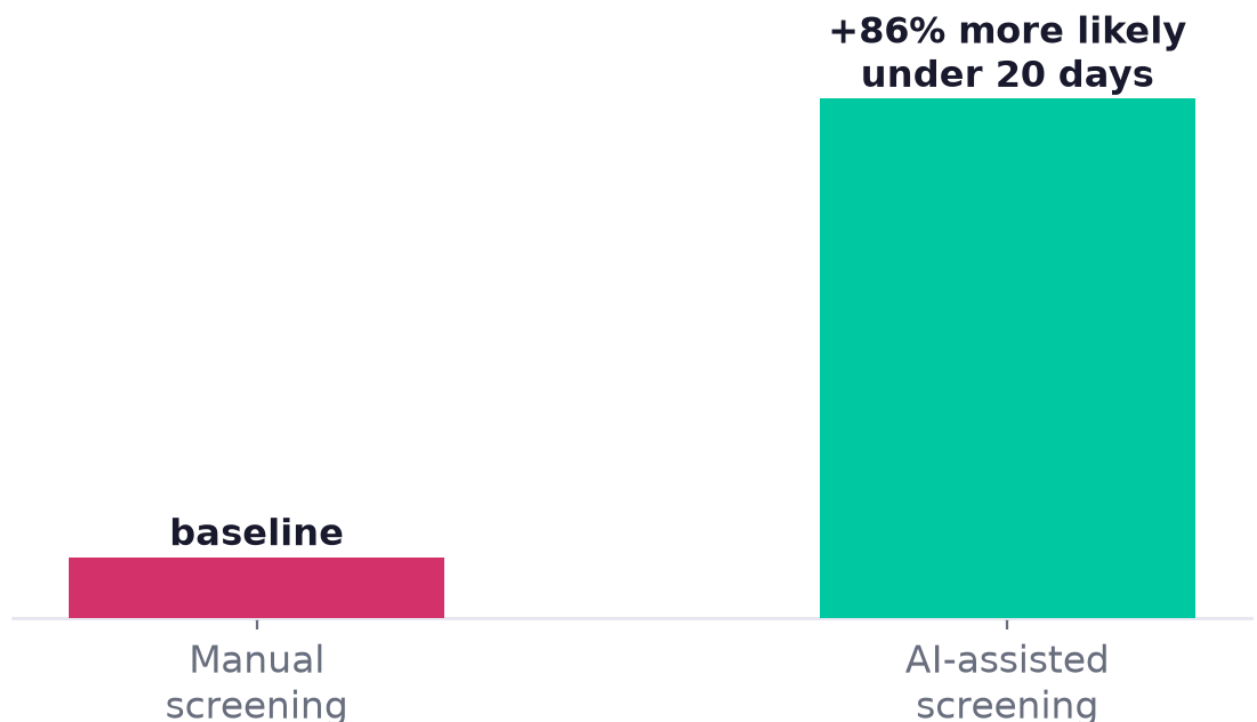
02 — The Clock

How fast do the best candidates actually disappear?

In about ten days — which means any manual sourcing lag is a direct, quantifiable loss.

The average candidate leaves the pool within about **10 days** of becoming available.⁷ Against that window, AI clearly wins: staffing firms using AI to screen candidates were **86% more likely to place candidates in under 20 days** compared to firms relying on manual screening.⁵

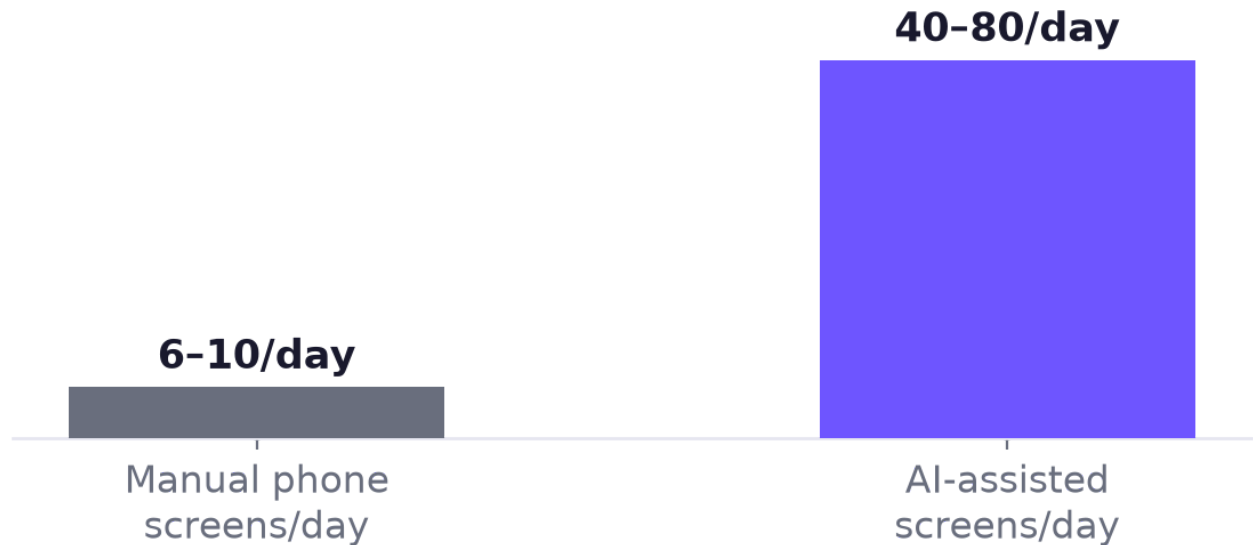
AI-screening firms are 86% more likely to place candidates in under 20 days



Source: Bullhorn 2025 GRID Industry Trends Report.

AI-augmented screening lets recruiters review **40–80 candidates per day versus 6–10 manual phone screens** — a 5–8x throughput increase.⁸

AI-assisted screening: a 5-8x throughput increase over manual phone screens



Source: LinkedIn Global Talent Trends 2024, cited in Outhire benchmarking.

03 – The Seasonal Surge

Why does peak season punish slow starters so badly?

Because a handful of employers with sophisticated hiring infrastructure now capture nearly half of all seasonal demand.

Amazon alone will hire **250,000 seasonal and permanent warehouse/logistics workers for the third straight year in 2025**, even as overall retail seasonal hiring is projected to hit a 16-year low of under 500,000 positions.²

Amazon's 250K seasonal hires represent roughly half of all 2025 retail seasonal hiring



Source: Reuters; Fast Company, citing Challenger, Gray & Christmas.

Unstaffed peak-season warehouses saw a 47% increase in safety incidents and a 23-point drop in shipping accuracy, while facilities that began seasonal recruiting in August — rather than waiting until October — reported **67% fewer safety incidents and 41% better order accuracy.**⁹

“With average tenure around 9–10 weeks, the position never truly closes — sourcing that resets every time a req reopens is sourcing that's always starting from zero.”

04 – The Wage Pressure

What's quietly driving so much of the churn?

Wage competition against retail and gig work — and it moves the P&L in real time.

Average hourly earnings in Transportation and Warehousing reached about **\$31.52** as of July 2025, compared with **\$25.71** in Retail Trade.¹⁰ Labor accounts for **50–65% of total warehouse operating costs**, making wage competition the single largest controllable line item.³

05 – The Playbook

What should a light industrial staffing desk do about it?

Five moves separate the desks that will win the next 24 months of light industrial hiring:

- 1. Compress sourcing-to-outreach to hours, not days.** With candidates leaving the market in roughly 10 days, any manual multi-day sourcing lag is a direct loss of placements.
- 2. Start seasonal recruiting cycles 60–90 days before peak.** Facilities that begin in August instead of October see materially fewer safety incidents and better order accuracy.
- 3. Build always-on pipelines, not per-req sourcing.** With average tenure of 9–10 weeks, the position never truly closes.
- 4. Track and react to local wage competition in real time.** Automated wage-benchmarking against competing local employers should trigger before turnover spikes.
- 5. Regionalize the playbook.** With the Southeast growing industrial staffing demand at 20%+ year-over-year versus flat West Coast/Midwest conditions, sourcing strategies should be tuned to regional labor-market tightness.¹¹

This is precisely the model UPPER was built to run: autonomous, always-on, multi-channel sourcing that refreshes the local candidate pool continuously — so a light industrial staffing desk never resets to zero when the next req opens.

Sources

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6. GCCA/IARW — 2019 North American Warehouse Employee Turnover Survey
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This report synthesizes third-party research current as of July 2026; figures are attributed to their original sources above. Some forward projections are inherently uncertain. UPPER edition H2 2026 — refreshed semiannually.