Demand Planner interview questions

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What to expect

Demand planner interviews in Australia typically assess your ability to build and defend a forecast, your comfort with statistical tools, and how you work with sales, marketing and finance. You will likely face a mix of process, technical and behavioural questions, with at least one scenario that tests your judgement when the numbers change.

- **Process:** Questions that ask you to walk through how you build, maintain and communicate a demand forecast from start to finish.
- **Technical:** Questions on statistical methods, forecast error measurement, and specific planning tools such as SAP APO or Kinaxis RapidResponse.
- **Behavioural:** Questions that ask for a real example of how you handled a forecast miss, a difficult stakeholder, or a change in demand.
- **Scenario:** Hypothetical situations that test how you prioritise and react when new information arrives mid-cycle.
- **Stakeholder communication:** Questions about presenting numbers to sales, finance or operations and managing disagreement.

A typical process starts with a phone screen with a recruiter, then a technical interview with the planning manager or a senior demand planner. You may be asked to complete a short forecasting exercise or case study. The final stage is often a panel with cross-functional stakeholders such as sales, finance and supply chain, where you discuss how you would handle a live planning challenge.

1. Walk me through how you build a monthly demand forecast from start to finish.

Why they ask

This is a core process question that shows whether you understand the full planning cycle, not just the modelling.

How to structure your answer

A walk-through structure: start with data collection and cleaning, then statistical modelling, then collaboration with sales and marketing, then final review with operations and finance. Finish with how you measure accuracy and adjust.

> **Example answer**
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> *"First I pull three years of sales history at the item and location level, clean out one-off events, and look for seasonality and trend. Then I run a baseline statistical forecast in SAP APO or Kinaxis RapidResponse, choosing the method that best fits each product family. Next I meet with sales and marketing to overlay promotions, new product launches and any market intelligence they have. After that I present the draft forecast to operations and finance in the monthly S&OP; meeting, where we agree on the final numbers. Throughout the month I track forecast accuracy against actual sales, and if error drifts I adjust the model parameters for the next cycle."*

2. What statistical methods do you use to clean and model demand data, and how do you decide which model fits?

Why they ask

This tests your technical depth and whether you can explain modelling choices to a non-technical audience.

How to structure your answer

Explain your approach step by step, name specific methods and tools, and give an example of a time you chose one model over another.

Example answer

“I start by reviewing the data for outliers, missing values and one-off spikes, then I classify demand patterns as stable, seasonal, intermittent or lumpy. For stable items I use exponential smoothing, for seasonal items I use Holt-Winters, and for intermittent items I use Croston's method. I test a few models against historical data and pick the one with the lowest forecast error, but I also check whether the model makes sense for the product. In one case, a new product launch had no history, so I used a similar existing product as a proxy and adjusted for the launch uplift. I always document why I chose a model so the planning team can follow the logic.”

3. Tell me about a time your forecast was significantly off. What did you do?

Why they ask

This assesses accountability, problem solving and how you learn from forecast misses.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: situation, task, action, result. Focus on what you did to correct the forecast and what you changed afterwards.

Example answer

“Situation: A major retailer ran a promotion that we had not fully captured in the forecast, and actual demand came in much higher than planned. Task: I needed to understand the gap and get stock to the right place quickly. Action: I pulled the promotion details from the sales team, re-ran the forecast at the item level, and worked with supply planning to expedite replenishment from an alternative warehouse. I also set up a weekly review with the account manager for that retailer so we could flag promotions earlier. Result: We covered the demand without a major stockout, and the following quarter we had no similar surprise because the weekly review caught two more promotions in advance.”

4. Sales have just told you about a major promotion that is not in the forecast, and stock is limited. How do you handle it?

Why they ask

This tests judgement under pressure, prioritisation and cross-functional communication.

How to structure your answer

A judgement-under-pressure structure: acknowledge the new information, assess the impact, decide on a course of action, and communicate clearly to all affected parties.

Example answer

“First I would thank sales for the information and ask for the promotion details: expected lift, timing, and which customers or regions are involved. Then I would quickly assess the stock position for the affected items, looking at current inventory, in-transit orders and lead times. If stock is short, I would prioritise the highest-margin or most strategic customers, and I would work with supply planning to see if we can expedite any orders. I would also let finance know the potential revenue and cost impact. Finally, I would update the forecast with a documented assumption and flag the risk in the next S&OP; meeting so we can plan better next time.”

5. How do you handle a finance manager who challenges your forecast numbers?

Why they ask

This probes your ability to defend your work with evidence while maintaining a productive relationship.

How to structure your answer

A stakeholder management structure: listen to the concern, show your evidence, find common ground, and agree on next steps.

Example answer

"I would start by asking what specifically concerns them, because finance often worries about the working capital tied up in stock or the risk of missing revenue. Then I would walk through the data and assumptions behind my forecast, including the sales history, promotion plans and any market intelligence. If they have a different view, I would ask for their input and see whether we can reconcile the numbers. Sometimes we agree to use a range or a sensitivity analysis. The goal is not to win the argument but to give finance confidence that the forecast is based on a sound process and that we are monitoring the risks. I would follow up with a written summary of what we agreed."

6. Describe your experience with SAP APO or Kinaxis RapidResponse.

Why they ask

This checks whether you can use the specific planning systems common in Australian supply chain teams.

How to structure your answer

An experience-based structure: name the tool, describe your level of proficiency, give a specific example of a task you performed, and mention any integration or reporting you did.

Example answer

"I have used SAP APO for three years in my current role. I build the statistical forecast in the demand planning module, adjust the model parameters for seasonality and promotions, and release the final forecast to supply planning. I also use the exception reporting to identify items where forecast error is high, and I drill into the history to see if there is a data issue. In Kinaxis RapidResponse, I have used the scenario planning feature to test the impact of a sudden promotion or a supply delay. I am comfortable importing data, running reports, and explaining the outputs to non-technical colleagues."