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Produce Pro Plus Warehouse Management System Case Study: Heartland Produce Co.

Project profile

- Implement the Produce Pro Plus WMS system for automating the outbound tasks of picking, checking and loading.
- Automated work assignment, worker tracking and product lot tracking for all outbound order selection.
- Mobile workers utilize a handheld computer for managing their work, scanning barcodes to capture key information, and updating the system in real time.



Results

With Produce Pro Plus WMS, warehouse supervisors gained more visibility into what their staff was doing and the remaining workload. They knew who was doing what task at any given time and when they finished. Supervisors and users also acquired greater visibility into where a product was in the staging and loading areas. They knew where the finished pallets were, what was on each pallet, what has been loaded on a specific trip and what has yet to be loaded, checked or picked.

Supervisors now spend less time finding information and more time using that information to manage work flow and streamline operations. Heartland can now also allow less experienced employees to perform new tasks without concern of mistakes or items being left off the truck.

“In a nut-shell, our warehouse and office management can manage work flow with a precision and ease that takes us to the next level of efficiency and agility.” – Corey Dietz, Director of Operations

- Mis-picks decreased by 86%
- Short ships decreased by 44%
- Picker productivity now automatically tracked and reported

Challenges

Heartland’s management team did not have an objective method to track and improve their warehouse operation. Based on their experience they knew it was less than optimal and they needed a comprehensive solution. Manual tasks such as order picking, order changes, order verification and loading served them well when they had fewer orders to fill, however the future of their business would require more precise tracking in order to control costs and improve order accuracy.

Management was faced with a number of concerns while overseeing an average of 300 paper tickets each day:

- Managing the picking process by paper was difficult, time consuming, and added the risk of papers being dropped or lost.
- Changing tickets in the process of order pulling was a cumbersome process as the picker would have to be called back or tracked down.
- Overages, shortages and mis-picks were too frequent.
- Lot changes required a trip back to the dispatch desk for the selector.
- Checking orders was a tedious process of matching up paperwork and manually double checking the lot numbers for each line.

- Trucks were sometimes not loaded correctly because of the manual process of sifting through a stack of tickets for that particular load.

Heartland Produce needed a solution that would allow for more management control, better visibility regarding their order pickers work, and real-time data utilizing handheld mobile computers to ensure the right product made it to the right customer on time every time.

Solution

In November 2009, Heartland Produce implemented the Produce Pro Plus WMS, utilizing barcode scanning and Motorola mobile handheld computers for automating outbound operations. Pending tasks are now managed electronically versus sorting through paperwork. Controls are in place to make sure procedures are followed and each step is completed before moving an order through the process. The system has improved handling of the picking assignments, better organized the order checking process and streamlined the loading process.

- Work assignments are assigned to individual pickers or teams eliminating the need to visit a ‘ticket station’ to check in.
- If a picker requests a lot change or reports quality issues the system sends messages directly to the supervisor via the hand-held computers.
- Shorts and other problems can be resolved while the rest of the order is still being picked so that the picker doesn’t need to stop and wait for instruction.
- Added support for single or double pallet jacks for each picking assignment.
- Items added or cut from unpicked sales orders are no problem as items can be changed right up until the individual line is picked.
- Finished pallets are tagged with a unique barcode and checkers can work on each pallet as it is dropped off in the loading area.
- Loaders are blocked from loading pallets that have not been checked, that have incomplete restocks pending against them, or that have items on them that are not on that trip.
- Barcodes on each finished pallet are double checked against a barcode on the truck trailer or door making it almost impossible to mis-load a pallet.



Customer profile

- Heartland Produce, located in Kenosha, WI, strives to be the preferred full-line produce wholesaler for retailers in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Indiana.
- Heartland Produce implemented Produce Pro Software in 2007.
- The company operates from an 80,000 square foot facility.

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