

Growing through greater warehouse efficiency

Harbor Wholesale: The switch to voice



Harbor Wholesale opted for a Körber voice system to replace outdated picking processes, and saw their operational efficiencies increase.

Harbor Wholesale distributes to over 2,900 convenience stores, grocery stores and restaurants across the Pacific Northwest and Alaska.

They service businesses of many sizes, from small, family-owned stores to large chains like Subway, Taco Time, and Skippers. They provide everything from produce and meat to cigarettes, delivering more than 160,000 items every day. These products are picked from two distribution centers (DCs) in Washington and Oregon.

At a glance

Project goals

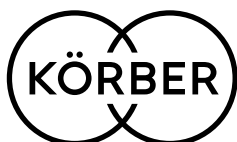
- Replace inefficient paper picking
- Integrate the solution with existing WMS
- Enable sustained business growth

Solution

- Voice-directed picking system

Benefits

- 50 percent increase in productivity
- 99.9997 percent accuracy
- Reduced training time



Challenge

After struggling with paper-based picking for many years, Harbor was looking at various solutions for a much-needed process update.

“There was nothing easy about picking with paper – anybody who has ever picked off paper knows that. Data entry had become a huge pain for us. It took hours to take all the information that the pickers were writing on paper and put it into the system.”
Noah Skelton, Warehouse Manager and Technical Operations Specialist for Harbor Wholesale.

Noah and his team briefly considered radio frequency scanning, but after a trial, decided against it. Then they discovered voice.

Harbor already had a voice system installed in their legacy system, but asked us to integrate voice with their new WMS.

“We were impressed by their absolute commitment to making the software work, and their willingness to make changes assured us that we would get what we wanted out of the solution. They were willing to go the extra mile and make sure that everything not only worked, but worked flawlessly.”

“Voice picking proved much more productive for us, and we really liked the fact that it was hands-free. Accuracy, productivity, and training time were all important, and voice delivered on every metric.”

Noah Skelton

Warehouse Manager and Technical Operations Specialist for Harbor



Solution

Voice was needed to transform Harbor’s operations, establishing processes that would help them sustain growth in the coming years.

As well as creating an interface between the WMS and voice, they also designed new distribution workflows, making this project truly collaborative.

“We knew that by optimizing pick paths and workflows, we could make a huge impact on Harbor’s operations. The teams on both sides had lots of great ideas about how to make things better. We achieved most of them and delivered a highly tailored solution.”

Richard Stewart

Head of Professional Services at Körber

Results

The project was an immense success, exceeding all expectations.

“The voice implementation was flawless. There were some minor issues that were discovered early on, but the software significantly improved every time a change was made. Going from paper to voice was a near immediate ROI. We couldn’t have been happier.”

Noah Skelton

Warehouse Manager and Technical Operations Specialist for Harbor

Increased productivity

Shortly after voice was installed, Harbor reported a 50 percent increase in productivity. With their team hands-free and eyes-free, it significantly increased their speed. Voice helped them increase their picking standards too, which meant they could focus their fastest team members onto their busiest product line: cigarettes.

“The minimum number of required picks per hour for workers in the cigarette area is 1100. We prefer them to pick about 1400 an hour, but with voice our fastest workers can reach nearly 1900 picks.”

Increased accuracy

Accuracy increased from 99.99 percent to 99.9997 percent. This had a positive impact on checking procedures, customer satisfaction and the customer service team, who now have fewer queries about wrong orders.

Reduced training time

Voice has transformed Harbor’s training procedures too. It used to take a couple of days to bring employees up to speed, but now training takes just a couple of hours.

“Trying to teach someone to pick with voice instead of paper is a night and day difference. Voice just makes everything easier. This reduction in training time means new employees can start working almost immediately, decreasing the amount of time managers need to spend supervising them.”

Lower operational costs

With a big increase of worker productivity, Harbor has also reduced its operational costs. Teams can pick at a much faster rate, so it takes fewer of them to keep up with the demands.

“It would be impossible, even if I tripled the number of employees I have, to pick with paper at the rate we are picking with voice now.”

Improved employee satisfaction

Harbor runs a productivity-based compensation program. Thanks to the increased accuracy, pickers can boost their numbers and take full advantage. Conversely, they are docked for errors or mis-picks, although this is much less likely to happen to them with this accurate and easy new system.



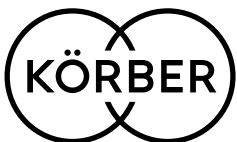
10 years later

In the 10 years since the voice project was completed, Harbor has transformed from a small distributor into a major power player in the Pacific Northwest and continues to grow.

“Voice has allowed us to grow exponentially, and I can honestly say there is no way we could have sustained this level of growth without it.”

Noah Skelton

Warehouse Manager and Technical Operations Specialist for Harbor



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