

Körber Supply Chain

Improving warehouse visibility with voice

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The warehouse of today faces a lot of pressure from both internal and external sources. Peak seasons and customer demands can wreak havoc on the most prepared operation, while management is always looking to cut costs and have more information than ever before. Luckily, voice technology has been adapted to address many of these problems, providing your warehouse with the visibility it needs to meet and exceed expectations.

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About voice

Voice technology for use in the distribution center was created with one purpose in mind: maximizing operational efficiency in the warehouse. Traditional warehouse technologies, like paper and RF scanning, require workers to transfer their attention from the task at hand to a piece of paper or screen and back, taking time and increasing the likelihood of error.

With voice, workers are hands-free and eyes-free, with the voice system feeding instructions from your WMS to your worker through a headset. This allows them to work quickly and efficiently, increasing productivity and accuracy throughout your warehouse. Voice is typically used to support tasks such as order selection, put-away, replenishment and cycle counting within the warehouse, but it can be deployed into many other areas as well. Industries with a high degree of human touch, such as Grocery and Food and Beverage, were early to embrace voice technology. However, the technology has made significant gains in other industry segments, including automotive service parts, retail, 3PL, eCommerce, manufacturing, wholesale and distribution.

Voice boasts benefits like improved productivity, accuracy, training time, and safety, with many companies reaching an ROI in less than 12 months.



Live inventory updates

With the rise of e-commerce, many businesses have had to transform their warehouses to handle online orders in addition to the regularly scheduled inventory shipments. This means that warehouses need more information than ever before to ensure they can meet the needs of customers.

The voice dashboard displays give you real-time views and alerts that enable you to react to the challenges of the day, and make adjustments in order to drive throughput and increase efficiency

across the board. These adjustments include workforce reassignment to meet order requirements, order management, and real-time replenishment to ensure you have the product on the floor when you need it.

Additionally, these real-time updates allow your mission critical systems to remain up to date as your workers are picking on the warehouse floor, ensuring that availability information on your website, or in-store systems will always be correct.

Interleaving processes

Although voice is most commonly used for picking, there are many other workflows that can be voice enabled to increase the efficiency of your warehouse. The visibility voice provides allows for interleaving of processes the moment they are needed, taking advantage of the picker that is already at the location that needs attention.

Cycle Counting

For many operations, cycle counting is one of the first workflows to get voice extended into it, as it is a natural fit and easy transition. To interleave cycle counting, a process is built into the voice system to trigger an alert anytime inventory in an active pick location drops below a threshold of your choice. Before giving the picker their next location, the voice system will request an on the spot cycle count to confirm that the amount at the location matches the amount shown in the system. This information will be immediately updated into the system, and any parties that need to be notified will receive a notification.

Replenishment

Replenishment can be built as a standalone process, combined with interleaved cycle counting, or both, depending on how you want your operation to look. When combined with cycle counting, the results of the scenario above would trigger a second command, either for the picker at the location or to a dedicated replenishment employee. This allows the location to be immediately replenished, removing bottlenecks caused by increased picking speeds.

When replenishment is utilized as a standalone process, the voice system will guide the worker through the warehouse, logging the replenishments as they move. This will automatically send an update into your inventory numbers, and notify the voice system that there is enough inventory for pickers to pick from again.



Individual performance tracking

With a traditional warehouse picking system, it can be very difficult to track and measure individual performance and statistics. This can be incredibly limiting, especially when you are trying to determine which performers should be rewarded or penalized.

With voice, each user has a unique login that is recognized by the equipment, and transmitted back into your WMS or ERP. As they move through the warehouse each task is recorded, allowing you to see how quickly they are moving through the warehouse, how many lines or items are picked per hour, and how much their performance has changed from a previous date.

This information can be especially helpful when performing reviews, as you have metrics to support any decisions. It also can aid you in determining the cause of bottlenecks, as you can see which workers are underperforming (or over performing) and causing the issue.



Summary

As expectations of the warehouse begin to climb, it is more important than ever for management to have the visibility they need. Voice allows you to stay up to date with everything happening on the warehouse floor, enabling you to make informed decisions and provide the correct information to those who need it.

Could Körber's versatile voice solutions be right the right fit for your operation?

Contact us to find out:

<https://www.koerber-supplychain.com/supply-chain-solutions/supply-chain-voice-solutions>

