

Transforming productivity and performance

Fox Racing: Voice activated success



To maintain growth, leading international motocross and lifestyle clothing brand Fox Racing needed to improve the performance of its distribution operations.

Based in California, with offices in Canada, China and Spain, the leading sports clothing retailer had expanded into surfing, wakeboarding and mountain biking apparel since its founding in 1974. With the demands of processing more than 35,000 SKUs across multiple channels, Fox were keen to implement a new WMS and introduce voice technology in order to drive its ecommerce business and retain its retail presence in major department stores worldwide.

At a glance

Project goals

- Keeping up with fluctuating order volumes
- Improved staffing level planning
- Reduced RF equipment replacement costs
- Reduced training times and “pilot error”

Solution

- Voice-directed working

Benefits

- Enhanced operations performance
- Improved efficiency and safety
- Streamlined testing and migrations
- Reduced hardware and training costs
- Better quality assessment and control



Challenge

New product lines and rapid growth meant Fox's business had reached a point where its current operations could no longer meet customer demand, notably when it came to same-day shipping. The business quickly identified that its paper-based picking system limited both productivity and accuracy, and that its RF technology was outdated and unreliable.

Their biggest challenge was their ability to keep pace with highly fluctuating order volumes, especially when planning distribution staffing levels. They also needed to resolve the recurring costs of RF equipment replacements, long worker training times and user errors.



“The decision to go with Körber was solidified when we were able to set up a live demo with our warehouse staff and our SKUs. To see the effect voice could have in our own warehouse was an exciting and eye-opening experience.”

John Romero

Director of Operations, Fox Racing, Inc.

Solution

Following a review of a number of voice providers, and a voice-vs-paper comparison test on pick-to-tote and cart picking, Fox chose Körber to implement voice picking at its three US-based distribution centers.

Hands-free was the only option. RF scanning was unable to deliver the desired productivity gains, and pick-to-light couldn't deliver the necessary flexibility or accuracy, especially where larger items were concerned.

Once it was set up, they saw a rapid improvement in accuracy and productivity with voice picking. The team saw an opportunity to leverage the voice system further, to see if it would improve workflow productivity. If they could generate as much as 15 percent improvement in productivity beyond picking, they could continue to expand their market reach. Furthermore, if they could transition more from RF scanning to voice, they could see additional benefits, such as increased worker satisfaction from supporting employees' efforts to meet their productivity and accuracy goals.

Before voice, cycle-counting was performed as a full-time function using RF scanning every three months, with only 60% accuracy, partly due to worker fatigue. But with voice picking being so efficient, pickers had extra time to work on other processes while they were waiting for the next order or cart to pick.

To improve accuracy and to reduce downtime, the WMS was programmed to calculate when to turn cycle-counts on and off, based on order volume. This meant that when picking personnel were standing by, a mandatory 90-day scheduled cycle-count would be triggered. Fox now performs less than 10 percent of scheduled cycle-counts in the normal 90-day cycle, since most locations have already been counted in advance.

To improve replenishment, Fox also deployed a dynamic slotting function, embedded into the voice system, requiring workers to drop items into bins, three to four times a day, depending on demand. This method reduced the travel path for picking and replenishment, since whenever the worker needed to replenish an item, voice would steer the worker immediately to the right aisle and the WMS would pick the next slot for the product.

Results

Efficacy

Adopting voice for receiving enables Fox to process multiple orders and schedule the necessary picking and receiving more effectively as products enter the distribution center. Not only has voice made it easier and faster for Fox to make changes, it has essentially liberated their team from RF scanning in all of its operational processes.

Efficiency and safety

The hands-free functionality saves time and improves safety, now workers can use both hands to open cases and drop the content into the pick bins. The long process of collecting an RF scanning gun from the holster, scanning the item, returning the gun to the holster and picking up the case, is no longer necessary.

Minimized disruption

Voice can also insulate users from changes to the system, allowing tests and migrations to be performed without issue. For example, when migrating from a homegrown ERP to SAP®, the voice users were never affected.

Reduced costs

With less hardware and less staff training required, voice is cost-effective too. With RF, the training time was approximately 12 hours, but with voice, it's only 1.5 hours.

The future

Thanks to the versatility of voice, Fox were able to quickly and efficiently set up the system across other facilities. They are now running voice at four distribution centers for receiving, replenishment letdown, replenishment put-away, cycle-counting, cart setup, and voice picking.

Based on this success, they are now developing a receiving put-away, packing, and pallet building/ carton consolidation, to guide workers through nearly every one of its warehouse processes. This will further transform worker freedom and productivity, leading to greater company growth.

“We would have been happy with the results we had attained just from using voice with picking, but the value-add we have found in applying voice for many other workflows, and the ability to interleave tasks, has made our overall performance skyrocket and keep pace with the growing demands of a successful business.”

John Romero

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