IN A CLUSTER

Bashas is a family-owned and operated grocer that began in 1932 when brothers Ike and Eddie Basha opened their first Bashas' grocery store. The company is based in Arizona, US and currently has more than 100 stores across the state. Its family of stores include AJ's Fine Foods, Food City and Bashas Dine Markets.

Bashas has 8,500 employees (members) and today has more than 100 stores. The company has one distribution centre that totals 700,000 sq ft, and packs around 900,000 cases each week for distribution to its network of stores across Arizona.

The relationship with WCS goes back nearly three decades, when WCS implemented its first WMS, Procurement and Store order systems into the warehouse at Bashas. The company was keen to gain maximum efficiencies in its warehouse and distribution facilities, and was an early adopter of warehouse management technology, including upgrades over the years to include voice directed picking solutions.

Having seen the benefits of warehouse management technology over a number of years, and driven by the desire to further improve accuracy the company embarked on a process to integrate and upgrade its voice-directed picking solution.

Voice technology in the warehouse has rapidly become the industry standard. The greatest gains are obtained in low margin, high volume, labour intensive operations. Accuracy and productivity are critical in modern distribution centres and the use of voice technology delivers this by utilising hands-free, eyes-free communications. Voice operation is particularly suitable for picking frozen and chilled foods, where gloves hamper the handling of paper or the use of radio data terminals.

PRODUCTIVITY GAINS

Since the integration of WCS' Voice Direct Selection the company has seen early benefits, Mike Basha, vice president Logistics at Bashas commented, "When we moved to Voice Direct Solutions for picking, the key immediate benefits were improved accuracy and productivity. We hope that with the implementation of cluster picking and labour management in the future, we will also see some valuable additional efficiencies to our organisation."

The voice directed work system integrates seamlessly with WCS' warehouse management system – with all voice-based transactions allowing for retail time maintenance of inventory levels and better synchronisation of replenishment activities.

Josh Makan, CEO at WCS said, "Accuracy and productivity are critical in the modern warehouse, and as the consumer continues to demand increasingly short delivery times the use of voice and techniques like cluster picking will become more and more critical to allow for maximum efficiencies.

Bashas' as an early adopter of voice, knows too well the importance of warehouse technology to allow it to remain competitive in this fierce grocery retail market."

CLUSTER PICKING ON THE HORIZON

Already seeing the benefits of voice, Bashas' is keen to allow its warehouse personnel to pick multiple containers, to get maximum efficiencies and maintain accuracy as the business continues to meet the demands of changing consumer needs. Cluster picking will allow for the picking of multiple orders at one time. The containers can be either totes containing order batches, discrete order shippers or discrete order totes.

Cluster picking is useful for pick to cart operations – where a cart is loaded with multiple totes or shippers and the picker will make one pass through the pick zone and sort to the pick containers, reducing unproductive travel. And, Vertical Lift Modules (VLM) or carousel operations utilising the independent zone picking technique. This technique can be used to optimise the VLM and carousel pods by limiting the number of machine cycles.

Labour management will also be the focus for Bashas over the coming months as it looks to improve further on its efficiencies. With the integration of the WCS Labour Management tool, it will allow Bashas to manage the warehouse workforce in an efficient and consistent manner. Enabling the management to measure and report the performance of individuals, groups or facilities and compare this data with pre-defined standards set for performing individual elements of work as defined.

Industrial engineered standard time calculations are embedded in the WCS solution and productivity for direct or indirect labour is available for managers to efficiently allocate labour resources. Comprehensive performance and productivity reports give full visibility into workforce operations by employee, shift, warehouse and work type allowing for comparisons over time. Objective measurements standardise employee goals, bring consistency to employee relations and support incentive schemes.

It is not unusual for labour management systems to provide a 10-15% productivity increase in high volume distribution centres.

Mike Basha said, "These recent steps to increasing our functionality will see us realise cost savings and efficiencies in our business which will ensure it's future-proofed." ■

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