New, Fully Integrated Put to Light and Shipping System Solution gives Music & Video Distributor Added Speed, Capacity and Visibility for eCommerce Fulfillment

Features and Benefits

Greater flexibility and ease-of-use with cablefree light module hardware.

Advanced software for improved visibility into operational productivity.

Provided added capacity within the existing facility infrastructure.

Increased speed for shorter order cycle times.

Industry Group: Order Fulfillment Solutions (OFS)

The Challenge

How can you improve productivity in an order fulfillment operation that is already utilizing an automated order sortation methodology? This was the challenge facing a leading specialty retailer of entertainment software, music, home video and video games with nearly 1,000 locations throughout the United States. The company's eCommerce distribution center in Carson, CA was being pushed beyond capacity by a big influx of internet orders.

The company already had an automated process in place. Customers orders placed through the internet are logged and staged for import into the shipping system. As 100 orders become available, a batch is released. Once the batches are picked, they travel to Put to Light workstations where individual orders are filled.

Each Put to Light workstation is divided into 100 separate cubicles for individual customer orders. Operators select products from the batch tote and RF scans the bar code label on each item. This initiates light modules on cubicles to illuminate if their order requires that item, and directs the exact quantity needed. This 'scan and sort' approach is a fast and accurate way to execute music, video, book

and other eCommerce order fulfillment. In 2006, at the same time the company's online business was climbing, the original provider of their Put to Light systems said that it was no longer going to support it.

The Solution
The company decided to use this as an opportunity to evaluate the latest technologies available to improve productivity throughout their eCommerce process. After careful evaluation it was decided that an all-new Put to Light system would be selected, as would an all-new shipping system. Seamless integration between the two technologies was a key project requirement from early on, so that they would perform as one solution.

The new Put to Light solution offered updated cable-free light module hardware design and advanced software to improve sortation performance. The Put system provider partnered closely with the new shipping system provider to completely integrate the both applications. The result was that as individual orders are filled in the Put to Light system, the shipping software consolidates the data to build the shipment requests for processing. Documentation for the orders is produced and the shipment is sent to the respective carrier.

The Benefits
The new system was installed in March 2007, and the positive results were immediate. The new solution quickly optimized the login, scan and put process. In the old system, operators needed to hand type numerous product codes in each batch. With new system, the shipping software consolidates product codes to increase readability of the more valid codes. Because of this the Put-to-Light application is better able to scan and match barcodes. In the old system, domestic shipping documents were printed to one printer and international documents were printed to a second printer. Now each printer is configured to print both domestic and international documents. The combination of the dual form printing along with a process design change to eliminate the need for 'external' lights have yielded print time efficiencies of 10x the old system.

The pack slip and ship labels are now immediately sent to the printer when the last item for a customer

order is put, reducing the opportunity for printing delays. The old system used a file transfer methodology to gather and send data, now improved communication routines strictly use a database read and write method. To minimize the risk of missing orders, a record (hash total) checking routine has been implemented. Now the company's operations staff is alerted to issues before the batch hits the shipping floor. These improvements have substantially increased the overall speed of the new system. The advanced automation also provides a new dimension of proactive operations management by alerting supervisors and managers to potential problems at an earlier stage in the fulfillment process.

The Music, Video and Game retailer also gains better visibility into the productivity of their daily operations through using a web-base portal that allows quick and effortless access to shipping information and operational performance statistics.

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