



GETTING A READ ON ACCURATE PICKING

UK publisher uses voice technology to increase productivity and achieve a nearly perfect pick accuracy rate of 99.98%.

By Lorie King Rogers, Associate Editor

Pick up a book in the United Kingdom and there's a good chance it came from the shelves of HarperCollins. HarperCollins' UK supply chain strategy is not only leading edge, but also a source of additional business income. HarperCollins operates a 750,000-square-foot facility near Glasgow, Scotland. From there, the company distributes its own titles to hundreds of outlets in the UK and worldwide and also acts as a distributor for 14 other publishing houses.

Although already very productive, HarperCollins' supply chain director Mike Levaggi and his team wanted to take service levels even higher. "We can ship as many as three million books in a single week," says Levaggi. "A major part of our work involves batch picking thousands of books, which are then introduced into a sortation system. We used to rely on paper pick sheets, and although our output stan-

dards were high, we spent too much time resolving batch picking errors before we could be confident that we had assembled the correct titles."

So, the team at HarperCollins went paperless and introduced a new voice picking software solution, (Voxware, voxware.com) to the operation. Workers interact with the system through hands-free devices, which are voice-enabled and can achieve nearly flawless speech recognition. Order picking instructions and confirmation messages are transmitted through the hands-free devices, eliminating the paper lists and adding to operator efficiency and accuracy. The packaged software solution, which is adaptable, portable and scalable, allows for a high level of flexibility and control.

With the new voice solution, HarperCollins was able to increase productivity by 8% and achieve a pick accuracy rate of 99.98%. The company

also realized benefits in employee training by reducing the training time to standard proficiency by 60%. Additionally, Levaggi and his team were able to extend the use of voice to support replenishment and bulk moving operations.

"We saw an opportunity to extend voice into other

areas, and thereby achieve a greater benefit," adds Anne Steel, HarperCollins' supply chain development manager. "We are very pleased with the adaptability of the solution and the flexibility it gives us in tailoring the voice technology to our operation. We were able to make adjustments quickly and with little disruption."

VOICE SOLUTION MANAGES **WORKFLOW** AND **CLEANS UP INEFFICIENCIES**

Global supplier of professional hair care products uses a voice solution to streamline workflows and reduce labor.

With a number of warehouses, a professional hair care product manufacturer needed to standardize and streamline workflows across many distribution sites to increase efficiency.

The Goldwell brand of hair care products is supplied by KPSS and is based in Linthicum Heights, Md. KPSS is one of 21 subsidiaries owned by Germany-based KPSS GmbH, a global supplier of professional hair care products, including Goldwell and other brands such as Curel, Biore and Ban.

KPSS had been working with a paper-based picking system that was manually intensive, so the core objectives in upgrading were to eliminate labor inefficiencies while reducing costs. It also needed a solution that could handle a variety of cultures and languages, as the company has warehouses in the United States, Canada, Australia, Finland, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Managers determined that a voice system could be easily integrated into its case- and piece-pick operations to standardize the workflows for replenishment, picking and packing. A voice solution could also provide maximum flexibility with changing business strategies, especially with the company's distribution partners.

KPSS refashioned operations with a voice solution (Vocollect, vocollect.com) that has made a significant difference. "We still print the paper ticket to view the size of the order for packing purposes, but then voice



takes over during the picking process," explains Brian Hatfield, KPSS vice president of supply chain for North America. "It converts the information into voice and states instructions over a headset to the picker."

"The system is smart," adds Hatfield. "When a picker signs in on their equipment, the system recognizes the worker's unique voice patterns and understands their accents and speech idiosyncrasies."

Flawless communications between the worker and the system have resulted in a number of improvement gains. Picking and replenishment labor has been reduced by more than 20%, new employee training can be done in less than an hour, accuracy is up over 99%, and there have been no lost time accidents since the voice solution implementation.

In less than one year, KPSS completed its deployment in Fresno, Calif., and Toronto, and expanded deployments in the United Kingdom. Looking into the future, Hatfield says, "The voice solution is scalable, so you can start small and take it across other functions of the warehouse." □