

Three Keys to Great Warehouse Management

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They're starting to get it now. After five years of contraction, stagnation and only modest growth, senior business executives who have been trying to squeeze inefficiency out of their supply chains are seeing how they can leverage technology to turn their warehouses into a competitive advantage.

Smart warehouse and supply chain managers have been making the case for years — companies that can fulfill orders faster and more accurately and with heightened focus on pleasing end customers can gain market share, revenue and profits.

A recent survey conducted by Motorola Solutions confirms that C-level managers increasingly see the opportunity, too, and are focusing their thoughts, energies and budgets on automating warehouse management like never before.

For example, the survey found 70 percent saying they plan to have more automated processes in their warehouses by 2018. Two-thirds said they will equip their warehouse workers with more technology, including wireless handhelds, tablets, and wearable or vehicle-mounted devices. And more than three-quarters of executives say they will migrate to best-of-breed [warehouse management systems](#) [1] in the next few years.

Why the strong drive to automation? In part, it's because the technology provides unprecedented command visibility that creates efficiencies that were impossible before.

How Automation Promotes Efficiency

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For example, a warehouse management system can help optimize the layout of your facility so high-churn items are in the front and less popular items are in the back. Or, consider the possibilities for technology that can track the location of each employee in the facility in real time, making it possible for pickers to double as stockers. The system would detect the location to which the picker is being dispatched and match it to an incoming item that needs to be stored in the same general area.

By cutting down on unproductive “dead head” trips within the warehouse, the company could reduce personnel costs, speed up stocking and picking and, ultimately provide faster, less mistake-prone service to customers.

Or, imagine being able to better coordinate the load packing and staging functions to reduce duplication of effort and. Data compiled over time are fed back into the system so you know what packing and loading arrangements are most effective.

Qualities to Seek in a Warehouse Solution

As you look for ways that automation might turn your warehouse into a revenue driver, be sure the technology you select enables these baseline capabilities:

Inbound Scheduling: You need the ability to create, schedule and assign inbound trucks to specific dock doors using an intuitive reservation calendar. That will keep the traffic moving and minimize wasted hours and fuel while trucks idle down the street.

Automation of Putaways: One of the biggest challenges in running a warehouse is handling receiving and putaways. Proactively managing receiving processes means ensuring that warehouse managers know which dock spaces need to open and at what time, which staff members need to be on site and which areas of the warehouse can hold additional product. With automation, incoming items are placed in the appropriate location for ease of access later. This not only saves time in the receiving process, but it also increases warehouse efficiency as stock becomes easier to locate.

At-A-Glance Reporting: Successful management requires knowing what’s in stock and where it is within the warehouse at any given moment. A good system, using barcode or RFID devices, can track packages and pallets while providing a 30,000-foot view, complete with graphical mapping. This makes it easier to gain visibility into what resources are on hand while enabling access to on-demand information and reporting for complete, end-to-end warehouse management. All information should be available in real-time by anyone who needs to see it, as opposed to being contained on the clipboard of some employee wandering a warehouse.

Mobile Efficiency: Speaking of clipboards, sure they were mobile, but isolated and human error could affect accuracy. Some of today’s management systems present the reverse problem: They might be accurate, but you can’t view the data away

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from your desk, creating inefficiencies for people who don't sit at desks for a living. But there are solutions that offer the best of both worlds. Today, a real-time picture of stock locations is available at all times to anyone in your organization who needs it, from manager to picker, on any mobile platform.

Remember, information is the key to running a successful warehouse. With an automated management solution in place, staying in sync ought to be as easy as opening an app on your smartphone or tablet. The results are greater efficiency, lower costs and improved revenue.

Tim Garcia is CEO at [Apptricity](#) [2].

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