Warehouse and Distribution Mobile Automation - Real Life Results!

After more than 20 years, Grain Millers has carved their niche as an organic and conventional whole grain miller and supplier of grain-based ingredients, such as flours, flakes and bran fibers. In addition, they built up their business supplying dairy ingredients, including butter, cheeses and cream. They have branched out into blending and retail packaging, becoming one of North America's largest oatmeal producers and supplier of specialized ingredients, such as organic honey, molasses and soybeans.

In order to handle the multifaceted flow of products and processes effectively, Grain Millers needed a more robust inventory control and warehouse management system (WMS). Outmoded manual data entry and documentation processes caused too many errors and sapped too much time and warehouse space. At times, they had to populate different systems separately, requiring duplicated effort. Inventory became lost. Staff squandered valuable man-hours searching for hard to find inventory. Managers found themselves unable to enforce strict FIFO rotations of inventory. Frustration grew as employees had no transparent view of inventory flow and lacked the means to track performance.

The challenges facing Grain Millers called for an entirely new inventory and warehouse management system (WMS). This system needed to automate all of their manual processes and provide higher visibility to inventory enterprise-wide. Grain Millers needed to tie together the back office, processing plant and warehouse – while improving accuracy and productivity. AbeTech hardware and Appolis WithoutWire™ (WoW) software combined for a robust, full-featured, cost-effective bar code solution designed to address four main areas of concern: inventory management, space optimization, order picking/shipping and reporting capabilities. The solution incorporated Appolis' WoW software along with top-line Motorola handhelds, Datamax bar code printers and Cisco wireless infrastructure equipment. Microsoft's mobile business solutions platforms (Dynamics SL, SQL, and Windows Mobile) provided user-friendly system interfaces.

System-directed tasks, such as picking and shipping or Grain Millers-specific outbound labeling could be cued automatically and enforced with bar codes. All inventory data was captured, stored and accessed easily via bar codes, virtually eliminating manual errors and wasted man-hours. With a simple scan, staff can access reports that show inventory quantities and movements in real-time, minimizing the demand for physical inventories and optimizing warehouse space. AbeTech and Appolis integrated their WMS solution so that product lifecycles could be client monitored from a PC screen and FIFO could finally become a reliable, measurable standard practice.

The scalability of the AbeTech/Appolis WMS solution has allowed Grain Millers to expand into several new warehouses. They have achieved complete end-to-end lot tracking for greater process efficiency, as well as more dependable food traceability. And productivity has skyrocketed, as automation has streamlined many processes, including cycle counts, saving workers from aimless warehouse searches or wasted movement and showing areas where additional labor would be advantageous.

"The AbeTech and Appolis inventory and warehouse management system enables us to manage our inventory, product rotation, traceability and recall capabilities. We are better able to determine where to put product in our warehouses and locate it easily at time of shipment. Their team approach is a benefit to us and our experience with AbeTech and Appolis has been very positive."

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