

Executing an Effective WMS Training Plan

In my previous Viewpoint, *Building an Effective WMS Training Plan*, I explained the importance of building a training plan when implementing a warehouse management system (WMS). I warned that without proper training of the project team and systems users, there is high likelihood of confusion, unnecessary errors, and excessive firefighting at go-live. The end result being lower system acceptance, decreased customer service, and delays in achieving the planned return on investment. However, to achieve a timely ROI and overall project success, the key is not just building a smart WMS training plan, but effectively executing it as well.

As a refresher, the components of an effective WMS training plan, include: documented standard operating procedures, a detailed training schedule, a list of all necessary equipment and materials, training data, and final preparations prior to training execution. In this Viewpoint, I will explain what is needed to effectively execute a WMS training plan – good communication, anticipating needs, thorough testing, flexibility and adaptability.

The goal is to provide each and every trainee with the best possible learning environment and the tools necessary to succeed. Training is all about transferring knowledge and encouraging system acceptance as a means of managing the transition from today's process to the process of tomorrow.

Good Communication

Effectively executing a WMS training plan requires good communication with the executive management team (EMT), IT, operations managers, trainers and trainees. Beginning with the desired end result in mind, the training plan should be written in conjunction with the EMT and IT, and receive their approval before the plan is communicated to the rest of the project team. Communicating the plan ensures all parties are on the same page and helps set and manage expectations. Managers need to understand and agree with the training schedule—after all, they're responsible for balancing the ongoing operational needs with the training needs of their associates.

IT will need to know the number of user profiles and training environments (typically one per trainee) needed to estimate the amount of processor and disk space required. Knowing this information in advance will provide enough lead-time for IT to prepare and make additional hardware purchases, or for you to make adjustments to the training schedule to make due without the additional system resources.

If the train-the-trainer approach is to be used, trainers will need to understand what is expected of them and how they will be equipped and supported by their manager and/or the project team. Require them to attend a “Train the Trainers” class to set expectations, provide training tips, and answer questions with the end goal of increasing their ability and confidence to be effective trainers.

Finally, trainees need to be notified in advance of training so they can prepare mentally. Offer several optional break-time meetings, sometimes referred to as “Lunch and Learns”, as means of preparing and involving all associates in the transition. These meetings provide an informal opportunity to get to know your future trainees and their needs—how proficient are they with computers and the English language? You may decide to offer a remedial computer course or some classes in a second language.

Anticipating Needs

Communication is key, but as it is said, “the devil is in the details.” This is true in the sense

that the smallest oversight in preparation for needs can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of your training effort. For example, failure to shrink the footprint of your training data by eliminating/purging unnecessary records can cause excessive data refresh times between classes, and possible delays in the training schedule. Training preparations can be broken down into two main categories: System Resources and Classroom Materials.

System Resources:

- Address storage and performance issues by adding more disk or processor if possible.
- If additional system resources cannot be added, reduce the number of trainee environments and increase the number of class sessions. Eliminate concurrent and same day classes where possible. The downside of this approach is that it may lengthen your training schedule.
- Reduce the training environment footprint by purging unnecessary data.
- Procure additional equipment (PCs, printers, RF or voice devices) or adjust the training schedule to share existing equipment when it is not being used.
- Request all user profile credentials for training systems.

Classroom Materials:

- Make sure to identify and reserve all classrooms & training equipment (projector, movable white boards, flip-

chart stands, etc.). If a formal training room is not available, you may need to get creative by converting a conference or storage room.

- Create Training Binders for each class, making sure to include all relevant SOPs and training exercises. Include pre-printed barcode labels for scanning and other reference sheets (such as NATO commands for voice-directed devices) as needed.



- Provide a note pad and pen. You'll be surprised how many students show up to training empty handed. People forget 80 percent of what they hear in 24 hours or less.
- Post Signs. Make the training room easy to find and put a sign on the door letting passers-by know that “Class is in Session” – so be quiet!

Thorough Testing

To effectively execute a WMS training plan, we've learned that you need a solid plan, good communications, and detailed preparations. But before you "pull the trigger" on your training plan, make sure you've tested it thoroughly. This means validating all hardware, software, and training exercises and data. Use the actual equipment (PCs, RF devices, printers, etc.) that will be used by your trainers and students, ideally one or two weeks before the day of class, to run through each curriculum set. Here's a partial list of items to test:

- PC Workstations (boot up; connected to network; monitors, keyboards, and mouse work)
- RF and voice-directed devices (boot up; connected to network; ample recharging stations)
- Training exercises (in source and trainee environments)
- Training data refresh process (data integrity; time required)
- Contingency plans (manual work-around solutions; secondary agendas)

Flexibility and Adaptability

There are many moving parts in a warehouse management system and as a result a WMS training plan should have some flexibility built into it. Last-minute changes to complicated systems and processes are a typical result of testing efforts, so make sure to incorporate them into SOPs and training. Expect them to happen and don't print training materials too far in advance of scheduled class dates; otherwise you will have to reprint or use outdated materials.

Scheduling can be challenging even when things are going smoothly. Delays and rescheduled classes are almost guaranteed, so it pays to leave some flexibility in your original schedule to allow some changes. Always make sure to schedule enough time between classes for data refreshes and coordinate with IT to perform.

Finally, mistakes happen and some details may get overlooked—both in training preparations and delivery. There are some things that happen that are simply out of your control (e.g. power outage, trainer gets sick, business "crisis" keeps students

from attending class, etc.). Therefore, your ability to be flexible and adapt plays a big factor in providing quality training. Keep an open mind and once training is underway, listen to your students and adapt to meet their needs as necessary. As a result, you'll reap the reward of well-trained associates who understand the solution, own the skills necessary to perform their job responsibilities, and hit the ground running.

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