

Viewpoint

Preventing Shipping Errors on the Receiving Dock

What is Most Important During a WMS Go Live?

The biggest headache for a DC manager during a WMS implementation is worrying about whether or not the system will fail and prevent product from getting to the customer. To prevent any issues that may arise, the managers along with the IT department typically place most of the support resources in the outbound areas of the warehouse. This typically leads to a false understanding of how the warehouse is actually performing because everyone is focused in one area. While everything appears to be going well, other areas such as receiving get overlooked.

With a depleted or minimal support staff, receiving supervisors and associates are forced to go alone during a go live. Even with good training, the users are working with a system that is new and in some cases intimidating. No warehouse management system is flawless and human error and data problems creep in 100 percent of the time. While picking and shipping product may be at the forefront of people's minds during an implementation, receiving plays an integral part in getting the product to the customer.

During a go live, many DCs are unable to effectively deliver product to the customer due to receiving errors and put away inaccuracies. If product is not accurately received and put away physically into the warehouse and systematically into the WMS, it is impossible for anyone to accurately pick it when an order is released. If receiving is done incorrectly, it will throw off the entire flow of the system and fill rates will suffer.

Inventory Accuracy During Go Live

While there is no perfect operation and no perfect WMS, there are some things that can be done prior to and during the go live to achieve a higher level of success in receiving, thus reducing inventory problems in the warehouse and subsequent shipping problems.

1. Get Control

- Identify areas on the warehouse floor that can be used as problem resolution areas in the event that something cannot be put away correctly.
- Identify key personnel for every shift that can be easily found in the event an issue is identified.
- Depending on the system, create specific “cheat sheets” for the associates to attach to their fork lift or scan gun. It's hard to always remember what control keys work in certain functions.

2. Train

- Spend additional time and focus on training the receiving and put away associates on all aspects of the receiving operation.
- Test the associates on their knowledge of the software before allowing them to begin working.
- Train certain associates on how to resolve specific issues as they come up. Be mindful of the potential problems (system or human) the associates may face once the system goes live. The support team won't be around forever.

3. Encourage communication

- Let associates know that mistakes happen and it's ok. If associates are fearful of making a mistake, they are less likely to report one.
- Σ ■ The implementation team should frequently walk the DC floor. If an associate needs help, he or she is not likely to start hunting someone down for help.
- Update the associates on the operations before and after the shift. Issues can be addressed at this time.

4. Document every issue

- As each problem is discovered, come up with a formalized process for documenting problems and their solution.
- Documentation may be the only resource available once the support team leaves. Therefore, make sure the documentation is accessible.

5. Constant Cycle Counting

- Accurate inventory drives the entire system and ultimate customer satisfaction.
- Adequately staff inventory control associates on every shift to reduce inventory inaccuracies.
- During down time, perform random location audits to verify the inventory is correct. Don't wait for the system to generate a cycle count.

Summary

When it comes down to it, the most important function of a distribution center is to deliver product to the customer on time and as ordered. Since all DC managers know this to be true, there is much focus on what is picked and shipped. What ultimately drives the fill rates for the DC is the inventory. The key to maintaining accurate inventory control begins when the inventory hits the receiving dock. Much of the receiving process is typically overlooked during a WMS go live since the outbound operations are considered to be more complex and important. It is because of this oversight that many companies struggle during a go live. With a little extra preparation and more control at the point of entry during go live, picking and shipping accuracies will increase as well as customer satisfaction.

Jay Maurer is a Project Manager at enVista. He can be reached at jmaurer@envistacorp.com or 404-271-1229.