



WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY HEATS UP PRODUCTIVITY AT REFRIGERATED WAREHOUSE

URS LOGISTICS

ATLANTA, GEORGIA



- industry**
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DISTRIBUTION

INVENTORY CONTROL · SHIPPING/RECEIVING

URS Logistics (formerly known as United Refrigerated Services), headquartered in Atlanta, is the largest provider of frozen and refrigerated distribution services in the United States.

Warehouse management operations were hampered by the use of hand-written stock sheets and data entry keying errors.

Shipping pallets were not tracked in real time, and the company relied on a paper-based data entry system for receiving and handling pallets. First, the delay between the time information was recorded on paper until it was entered in the computer. Second, the delay from getting information into the computer and into the hands of warehouse workers and management. Additionally, URS experienced many errors with the paper system when forklift operators had difficulty in writing information on paper in extremely cold environments (0 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit).

URS wanted to track bar coded pallets continuously from receiving to outbound distribution. First, the warehouse would receive advance notice electronically that a load was due to arrive soon, so that URS could pre-print pallet labels at the dock for the arriving trailer. Once labels are affixed, each pallet would be scanned every time it is moved or handled, so that status and location information would be entered into the warehouse system on a real time basis. Then, the company wanted to scan a pallet and have the system direct the forklift operator to the proper put-away location, so product would be immediately available for filling orders. URS wanted the system to be flexible enough to accommodate both case picking and pallet pulling operations, with easy access to pallet information.

The challenge URS faced was securing a solution that could sustain the harsh environments of its warehouses, many of which operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Forklift operators move inventory in and out of the warehouse with extreme temperature change and the data collection terminals frequently operate at 20 degrees below zero Fahrenheit. For the pallet application, Intermec provided the MODEL 4400 Direct Thermal/Thermal Transfer Bar Code Printer, given URS' high volume and rugged requirements. The new wireless system uses an existing frame relay network to transmit the data from each warehouse to the RISC-based AS/400 host in Atlanta, Georgia. An Intermec MODEL 200 Universal Network Controller is located at each remote warehouse, which provides the interface for the data collection terminals back to the host computer. Workers use JANUS™ J2050 RF Vehicle Mount Computer mounted to forklifts with long range laser scanners. Transaction response times consistently achieve a one-to-three second response rate.

benefits

URS has achieved significant savings and labor efficiencies with the new system. Real time inventory gives URS the ability to be more productive in the warehouse. Replenishment on the picking line is just one good example of increased flexibility and efficiency resulting from the use of the new bar code system. Previously, URS depended on time-sensitive reports to determine when and where something needed replenishment. That now takes place concurrently with picking and stocking operations, without requiring an additional shift.