



the speed challenge

Sponsored by Motorola

That's the spirit!

Voice picking has nearly doubled productivity at Southern Wine & Spirits' distribution center in Kentucky. Accuracy has also improved dramatically. Let's raise a glass to them!

WHAT WOULD THE KENTUCKY DERBY BE WITHOUT MINT JULEPS? Or the Bourbon Trail without its namesake? While Kentuckians take pride in sharing their superb whiskey brands with the world, Southern Wine & Spirits also makes sure that bourbons and other beverages of choice are readily available throughout the Blue Grass State.

Southern Wine & Spirits (SWS) is the nation's largest wine and liquor distributor, with operations in 27 states. The company is known for listening to its customers and for taking a leading position in distribution. Eleven of its distribution centers now also listen in another way. They use voice-based logistics systems to select orders. SWS's Kentucky facility is the latest to adopt this cutting-edge technology.

Operating from a 217,000-square-foot building in Louisville, SWS distributes liquor, wine, and other beverages to retailers, restaurants, bars and clubs across the commonwealth. Since moving to voice for its split-case bottle picking, it has increased speed, accuracy and flexibility, while improving its allocation of labor.

Hear, there and everywhere

Up to 17,000 full cases of wine and spirits ship every night from the Louisville DC. In addition, between 8,000 and 15,000 bottles make up repacked cases containing mixed SKUs. Repacking is a very labor-intensive activity that used to be completed with paper lists. Now, voice systems operating on rugged Motorola mobile computers direct split-case picking and repacking. The Motorola computers, including the new MC9000 model, incorporate the Jennifer voice software from Lucas Systems (www.lucasware.com). Picking instructions are relayed through a headset connected to the Motorola computer, which is worn on a belt pack.

Jennifer, the recorded voice of the Lucas software, first coordinates the picking of slower-moving SKUs stored on shelving. Workers are given specific locations and needed quantities for

selecting bottles. Upon arrival at the first location, the worker speaks a two-character check digit back into the headset and also confirms the number of bottles selected. He then deposits them onto carts and tells the voice system where on the cart the bottles were placed. The carts are wheeled to the end of adjacent flow racks.

The flow racks, straddling both sides of an aisle, contain faster-moving SKUs. The Jennifer software instructs pickers in a similar manner to place individual bottles into cartons that slide along the rack faces.

The picking software is designed with a great amount of flexibility. "What it allows the pickers to do is have better versatility in selecting," says Don Laroche, director of operations in Louisville. "While giving the check digit, the worker can be moving to the next location. There is no paper to deal with. He can be more efficient."

A worker can either pick all items for a carton or pass it along to another associate farther down the line to complete. He can also cross the aisle to

pick from the opposite flow rack. Once the carton reaches the end of the aisle, bottles of slow-moving products are removed from their carts and added to the cartons. They then convey to a quality control area, where the contents of selected cartons are verified using a Motorola handheld scanner.

Since the voice technology was installed last August, picking rates have improved dramatically, from an average of 250 bottles per man hour to 460. Handling heavy glass bottles is also much easier with the hands-free system. In addition, accuracy has greatly improved. With paper, picking accuracy was only 93 percent. With voice, it now stands at 99.6 percent.

"In the past, mistakes did not get caught until the delivery driver brought it back. We had 2 to 3 percent mispicks," says Laroche. "The results of the pick-to-voice are better than we could ever have hoped."

For more information on Motorola, call (800) 367-2346 or visit www.motorola.com/symbol.



To watch a three-minute video of operations at Southern Wine & Spirits' Louisville distribution center, go to www.dcvelocity.com and click on The SPEED Challenge.