

TOP 10 LOSING WAREHOUSE STRATEGIES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM

WHITE PAPER

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Old habits can be hard to break, but when it comes to improving your warehouse management operations, you'll reap big rewards if you lose these 10 outdated practices and strategies and adopt new ones that take advantage of the latest advances in mobile technology. Wins for your organization include better real-time material and inventory visibility, connectivity, and control; improved decision making and accountability; competitive differentiation and stronger customer loyalty; faster response times to customer demands; and higher profitability.

1

Receive products manually and then have someone key the data into a fixed terminal.

2

Don't require your suppliers to provide bar code labels and Advanced Ship Notices for incoming materials.

3

Allow material handlers to put product wherever there's an open slot and then write the location down on paper.

4

Insist workers manually perform cycle counts using paper forms.

5

Force all tasks onto a single (possibly legacy) mobile device, even when that device has significant ergonomic and technical disadvantages.

6

Use printed reports to figure out which pick slots need to be replenished.

7

Make pickers juggle handheld devices and paper lists — while ignoring all the hands-free technology that can make life much easier for them.

8

Avoid equipping managers and workers with real-time voice communications and make them rely on inefficient face-to-face communications and batch processing.

9

Fail to invest in tools that can help you proactively manage your infrastructure and your mobile devices.

10

Give your workers consumer-grade instead of rugged or industrial-class devices — because who needs reliable devices tough enough to withstand your warehouse?

1

Receive products manually and then have someone key the data into a fixed terminal — a slow and redundant process that is prone to errors and delays that will cost you, big.

INSTEAD: Use mobile computers with bar code scanners or RFID readers at the receiving dock to immediately identify products on arrival. This helps get product off the dock quickly and eliminates nearly all the errors associated with manual receiving: including identification, counting, and data entry errors. With scanning and RFID technology, you'll avoid the mistakes that wreak havoc with inventory accuracy and eat up time and resources to fix. And that means your warehouse staff can focus on processing customer orders more quickly.

2

Don't require your suppliers to provide bar code labels and Advanced Ship Notices (ASNs) for incoming materials. Without them it's nearly impossible to unload and receive efficiently, and it's also difficult to match items with orders.

INSTEAD: Require your suppliers to provide bar code labels or RFID-tagged packages and ASNs for all incoming shipments. That way when materials arrive at the receiving dock, they can be proactively prioritized for unloading and receiving. By making it easy for your staff to identify each item and associate it with a valid purchase order, the process will move more quickly and without excessive back-and-forth with the procurement department.

3

Allow material handlers to put product wherever there's an open slot and then write the location down on paper — an outdated method that causes all sorts of problems.

INSTEAD: Track all material moves and ensure everything is put away in the correct spot, instantly, by scanning all destination locations including rack, shelving, or in bulk. When coupled with system-directed functionality, you'll be able to assign locations close to pick slots where product is likely to be needed next. Place fast-moving items in prime locations that are easily accessible. In the end, your warehouse will operate much more efficiently than it would with a traditional manual system.

4

Insist workers manually perform cycle counts using paper forms — a labor-consuming process that produces lots of errors, and can even complicate and interrupt order processing.

INSTEAD: Use bar code scanning and RFID to capture inventory counts and update them on the spot. No more bringing in your staff in the middle of the night: With a system that records and updates inventory in real time, your people can take inventory during normal business hours in a fraction of the time. No matter what gets put away or picked, your inventory status will always remain up to date. And when you have visibility into every area of the warehouse, workers can adapt to changing priorities to prevent bottlenecks and outages that can delay order fulfillment. To top it all off, your staff should be able to shave off one-third of the time it takes to count all your inventory locations.

5

Force all tasks onto a single (possibly legacy) mobile device, even when that device has significant ergonomic and technical disadvantages. When devices are poorly suited to tasks, productivity, accuracy, and morale suffers.

INSTEAD: Match the mobile device to the task. Use the most appropriate handheld, wearable, or vehicle-mounted device for your workflow and data capture requirements. Workers who spend eight hours a day, all day, in your warehouse shouldn't have to suffer using awkward devices that slow them down just to save some up-front expense or streamline the IT function. Settle on mobile devices that are suited to each task and, where applicable, use ergonomic keyboards and easy-to-read screens — in color with larger font sizes. It will actually prove to be more cost effective in the long run.

6

Use printed reports to figure out which pick slots need to be replenished — unless you enjoy stockouts and order errors.

INSTEAD: Scan the product and location to make sure the right item gets into the right pick slot. That way you'll be sure all pick slots remain adequately stocked with the correct items during replenishment. You'll avoid stockouts and mistakes that are costly in terms of wasted man-hours and unhappy customers.

7

Make pickers juggle handheld devices and paper lists — while ignoring all the hands-free technology that can make life much easier for them.

INSTEAD: Consider hands-free, real-time technology to direct and confirm each pick. Equip your pickers with hands-free devices, and they'll no longer have to struggle with un-holstering and re-holstering a scanner while trying to pick and carry product at the same time. Not only will this allow them to do their jobs faster, but they'll also work more safely and with fewer mistakes.

8

Avoid equipping managers and workers with real-time voice communications and make them rely on inefficient face-to-face communications and batch processing.

INSTEAD: Utilize real-time technologies to optimize your workflow. Leverage your existing wireless local area network (WLAN) and voice-enabled devices to provide efficient communications between staff spread throughout your site. When everyone can communicate via voice and data at any time, there's no more walking around the warehouse looking for workers to do a job. Your WLAN can also be used as a conduit for your mobile devices to 'speak' to your inventory system in real time, giving your workers and managers the updated information they need to be more effective.

9

Fail to invest in tools that can help you proactively manage your infrastructure and your mobile devices — and just deal with the downtime and frustration.

INSTEAD: Invest in tools to help you secure, provision, monitor, and maintain performance levels. Give IT the ability to better manage mobile devices, keeping device performance high and downtime low. Application software can be upgraded remotely, company-wide — thus avoiding the typical compatibility issues that arise when employees are using different software versions. IT can identify a problematic device before it fails, so its user doesn't have to stop working to wait for a replacement. And don't forget about the batteries. Manage battery charge cycles by choosing devices with battery information indicators and Web-based access to device metrics. This will prevent workers from having to stop what they're doing to replace batteries during their shifts, sometimes multiple times.

10

Give your workers consumer-grade instead of rugged or industrial-class devices — because who needs reliable devices tough enough to withstand your warehouse? Savor a one-time savings in device acquisition and suffer months or years of operation disruptions and much higher costs over the long run.

INSTEAD: Spend a bit more for devices that are built to withstand the drops, dirt, and environmental challenges that are typical of the warehouse environment. Considering the relatively high rate of failure of consumer-grade devices in this setting, and the resulting downtime and repair charges, it won't take long at all for the lower total cost of ownership of the industrial class devices to pay dividends.

Conclusion

Albert Einstein said that insanity is "doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." So consider dropping these losing strategies once and for all and, instead, adopting the innovative alternatives presented here. If you do, you can expect to see error rates and labor costs plummet while productivity, real-time visibility, inventory turnover, customer loyalty, and profitability increases. And there's certainly nothing crazy about that. To learn more about how you can streamline your own warehouse management operations with best practices and innovative mobility solutions from Motorola, visit www.motorolasolutions.com/warehouse or call 1-866-416-8593.

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