

VELOCITY VIDEO CASE HISTORY

A DC VELOCITY SPEED CHALLENGE

Sponsored by Accu-Sort Systems

It's a match!

The Swiss Colony's Match Code system makes sure that each order carton gets to the right customer every time.

CUSTOMER SERVICE IS THE LIFEBLOOD OF any catalog business. If orders are not accurate, chances are customers will shop elsewhere next time. That is why catalog merchandisers like The Swiss Colony go to great lengths to make certain that the items in a customer carton match exactly what has been ordered.

One area of fulfillment where such order accuracy is crucial is in automated packaging and labeling. With automated print-and-apply labeling systems, it is imperative that the correct customer label is placed on the right carton. Even a slight error in label processing can throw hundreds of orders out of sequence.

"If we send just one customer an order that is wrong, that is bad enough. But if the print-and-apply gets off by even one label, then every order behind it is wrong," explains Jeff Mucks, director of non-food fulfillment at The Swiss Colony.

To insure that its labeling systems are accurate, The Swiss Colony employs a Match Code process at its distribution facilities in Madison, Wis. and DeWitt, Iowa. The operations rely on laser scanners from Accu-Sort Systems (www.accusort.com) to capture and compare bar-code data. Precision Drive & Control of Monroe, Wis. (www.precision-drive.com) was the designer and integrator on this turn-key system.

Is data fact?

An example of the Match Code process in action can be seen at the DeWitt, Iowa facility. To begin order fulfillment, a bar-code label is placed on order cartons before picking begins. This identifies that carton with a particular customer order and is read by scanning equipment to route the carton through the pick zones.

Once picking is completed, each carton is sent to a packaging line where it is sealed and a customer address label that also contains a bar code is printed and automatically applied to the top of the carton. The package then passes an Accu-Sort Model 22 scanner that

reads the bar-code label that was placed onto the side of the carton at the beginning of the picking process. Again, this label identifies that carton with a particular customer order. At the same time, an Accu-Sort AXIOM scanner reads the bar-coded customer label that was placed on the carton by the print-and-apply system. The information gathered by the Model 22 is then relayed to the AXIOM scanner via a serial connection. The AXIOM internally compares the Model 22 data with the scan it made of the customer label. If the two do not match, the AXIOM alerts the warehouse management system that there is a problem needing corrective action.

The advantage of this design is that it does not require external PLCs to perform the Match Code functions. All of the technology needed for the operation is self-contained within the AXIOM laser scanner. The system provides highly accurate reads with cartons spaced only 3 to 4 inches apart, with the AXIOM scanner able to read bar codes up to 72 inches away. By using the Match Code system, The Swiss Colony assures that its labeling operations are completely accurate—a process that would take a large

number of employees to inspect manually. In addition to the Match Code functions, Accu-Sort scanners are used throughout the building for other processes. The Model 22s are installed on conveyor lines to scan cartons for diverting to pick lanes and are also used for a weight check function, further assuring order accuracy. Additional AXIOM scanners are also deployed near shipping to reliably read carton bar codes for a shipping sorter.

"We have never had any problems with the scanning systems," adds Mucks. "We cannot say enough about the reliability of the Accu-Sort products. Everything we do is much more accurate than we did before."

For more information on Accu-Sort Systems, call 800-BAR-CODE or visit www.accusort.com. To obtain information on Precision Drive & Control, call 800-832-1558 or email dschumacher@precisiondrive.com.



To watch a short video showing the Match Code system in action as well as other operations at The Swiss Colony's distribution facilities in Madison, Wis. and DeWitt, Iowa, go to www.dcvelocity.com and click on this month's Velocity Video.