

thespeedchallenge

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Distribution champ

A new distribution center near Kansas City is expected to save GEAR For Sports a million dollars a year on distribution costs.



LOOKING FOR A NEW SWEATSHIRT OF YOUR FAVORITE COLLEGE sports team? Chances are that when you find it, the shirt will have passed through GEAR For Sports' new Lenexa, Kansas distribution center. Designed to consolidate five separate warehouses, this new facility is in a league all its own.

Up to 70,000 shirts now ship from the DC daily. The ability to process such high volumes in the 300,000 square foot building is due to a sophisticated handling design from the Siggins Company. It includes narrow aisle storage, conveyors, a pop-up sorter, and a two-story pick module featuring 3,000 pick-to-light (PTL) units supplied by PCC Systems.

The Windows-based Lightning Pick PTL system has saved tremendously on labor over processes in the old facilities. Before, workers selected individual orders into wheeled carts. Often the items in the orders would be quite a distance apart.

"We had lots of walking time," recalls Jerel Williams, director of warehousing. "We wanted a system that would reduce travel and would also simplify the picking process for our workers, because the majority of our workforce does not speak English. They actually speak seven different languages."

The pick-to-light system solved both problems. Workers function in designated zones and walk very little. Lights direct picking for each order, so the system transcends any language barriers.

"The system has simplified our training as well," adds Williams. "A new associate can be productive in about one fourth the time that it took under the old system."

Geared for efficiency

GEAR For Sports is the top brand of apparel sold in college bookstores, golf courses, resorts and military installations. Shirts

and jackets are manufactured overseas as "blanks," meaning that they arrive at the Lenexa DC without logos or designs. They are then picked by order and sent to six area manufacturing facilities where college and client logos are screened or embroidered onto the garments to customer specifications.

PCC designed a cost-effective system that optimizes the DC's fulfillment based on pick frequency. Supervisors can monitor picking activity and order status in real time through Lightning Pick PC stations located throughout the facility. PCC software first identifies needed SKUs for each order and routes picking tasks to appropriate work zones.

Fast movers are selected with the LP Pick PTL system from flow racks. Lights direct the picking of items into order totes that are then placed onto a conveyor. Slower movers are selected from shelving using radio frequency terminals via LP RF. By utilizing the best technology for each order situation, GEAR For Sports has maximized its resources and provided a favorable return on investment.

In addition to the picking software, PCC provided extended applications to serve as middleware between the facility's Oracle ERP and individual machine controls. LP Messenger controls the weighing, manifesting, labeling and shipping systems, while LP Convey interfaces with the conveyor controls. Considering such complex systems, the integration went very smoothly.

"Everytime in the past when we added a third-party software we had problems," says Randy Staebenow, VP of manufacturing and warehousing for GEAR For Sports. "But we had no systems issues with the PCC software. That was a pleasant surprise."

—By David Maloney, Special Projects Editor

For more information on PCC products, call 262-251-3000, or visit www.lightningpick.com.



Lights direct workers in selecting orders within the pick module at GEAR For Sports in Lenexa, Kansas.

To see a 3-minute video highlighting operations at GEAR For Sports' new distribution center, go to www.dcvelocity.com and click on The SPEED Challenge.