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Mobility starts at home

Motorola relies on the entire range of its own enterprise mobility products to efficiently run its distribution center on the Texas-Mexico border.

MOTOROLA IS A COMPANY THAT PUTS ITS MONEY WHERE ITS mouth is. As a leading supplier of enterprise mobility systems for the supply chain, Motorola has equipped its own distribution operations with the same mobility solutions that it provides its customers. As a result, Motorola has full visibility into its operations, industry-leading order accuracy and complete control over inventory, which results in exceptional customer service.

However, that was not the case with Motorola just a few years ago. At that time, Motorola's enterprise mobility solutions business, then known as Symbol Technologies, had only paper-based distribution working from five warehouses in New York. The facilities did not have a warehouse management system or any wireless infrastructure. It took several days for the warehouses to fill orders, and accuracy was hovering in the range of only 90-95 percent.

"We needed to improve our distribution operations, including our velocity, inventory accuracy and shipping accuracy," says Jim Aikman, senior director of worldwide distribution and logistics for Motorola. "We needed better customer satisfaction."

To meet its objectives for faster, more efficient processing, the five facilities in New York were consolidated into a state-of-the-art \$28 million distribution center in McAllen, Texas. The new facility is right across the border from manufacturing operations in Reynosa, Mexico, which allows for faster movement of products through the supply chain. The location is further enhanced by siting the 334,000-square-foot facility within a free trade zone.

The new DC combines sophisticated handling technologies with Six Sigma methodologies. The enterprise mobility solutions include Motorola's mobile computers, radio frequency scanners, RFID units and a wireless infrastructure.

"We have no pencil or paper here," says Alex Avila, senior operations manager at the McAllen facility. "The human error factor has been minimized now that we are totally mobile with wireless systems."

With the addition of the enterprise mobility solutions, the McAllen facility accomplishes more work each day with only 74

employees than the previous five facilities could do with over 500 associates.

Mobile fulfillment

Much of the filling of orders occurs within the five aisles of flowrack that make up the facility's primary pick module. Information for the picks is relayed via radio frequency from the warehouse management system to Motorola handheld terminals, providing pick location, quantity and destination carton for each order. Items are scanned with the data terminals to confirm proper picking. Bulkier items and large quantities are selected from pallet racks. Mobile computers and handheld RF scanners direct workers using order pickers and pallet jacks in choosing these items.



Elsewhere in the building, scanners are used at the receiving dock to process incoming goods. The systems also guide work in the configuration area, where hardware components are customized and software is loaded onto mobile units according to customer specifications. Many finished goods are also sent to a system repack area used to gather and pack all of the components needed for individual customer orders. In addition, handheld and fixed RFID readers are deployed at shipping bays to record the products shipped for each order as they exit the facility's dock doors.

The enterprise mobility products have greatly impacted Motorola's ability to meet its customer commitments. Orders now ship the same day with 99.9 percent accuracy. Inventory accuracy, which had been at only 91 percent, is now at 99.5 percent.

"A commitment to real-time technology from wall to wall, combined with a Six Sigma approach to process improvement, is what makes this facility more effective," says Mark Wheeler, principal of supply chain solutions for Motorola.

Like its customers, Motorola has seen firsthand the transformation that can occur when a facility operates with enterprise mobility solutions.

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

To watch a short video showing how enterprise mobility solutions are deployed at Motorola's McAllen DC, go to www.dcvelocity.com and click on The SPEED Challenge.