

VELOCITY VIDEO CASE HISTORY

A DC VELOCITY SPEED CHALLENGE

Following doctors' orders

Seneca Medical has improved fulfillment productivity of medical equipment and supplies by 25 percent since moving to voice picking.

EVER-RISING MEDICAL COSTS ARE PUTTING pressure on hospitals, clinics, nursing facilities, and doctors' offices to look for ways to save without sacrificing quality of care. In turn, that causes medical supply companies to look to technologies that help them to lower their own costs to stay competitive.

Such is the case with Seneca Medical, the fourth-largest distributor of acute-care medical products in the United States.

The company is a regional supplier, with most of its customers in the Midwest. It operates six distribution centers located in Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia, Tennessee, Michigan, and North Carolina.

Seneca Medical's largest distribution center is in Tiffin, Ohio. The 310,000-square-foot facility offers a full range of products. "We provide everything from Band-Aids to medical tables," says Keith Price, vice president of information services. These products must ship on time and be accurate, as lives may depend on that speed and quality of processing.

Several years ago, Seneca Medical realized it needed to improve its order fulfillment. To determine the path it should take, managers contacted Speech Interface Design, a consulting and engineering firm that specializes in designing, implementing, and supporting Honeywell Vocollect voice-directed workflow solutions. "Speech Interface Design brought us industry experience and best practices. They made some very good recommendations on our processes," explains Price.

PICKING WITH SURGICAL PRECISION

After piloting the Honeywell Vocollect voice solution in Tiffin, Seneca Medical rolled out the technology to all six of its facilities, some of which operate multiple shifts. Currently about 200 associates use 110 units for order selection, including 50 workers with 35 Vocollect voice units in Tiffin. The facility has applied voice for two types of picking – bulk selection that comprises mostly case picking, and low-unit-of-measure order filling, which involves the

selection of individual items, or eaches.

The bulk area holds about 14,000 SKUs. The voice system directs workers manning walkie-rider trucks to pallet racks, where items are selected from bottom levels. The system provides the location and quantity of cases to select. To confirm the correct location, the worker uses the mobile device's wireless headset and microphone to read the last three digits of the manufacturer's item number into the voice system. It will not allow the pick to continue unless the appropriate digits are read. Seneca Medical believes this method is more accurate for its products than reading off check-digit numbers that are normally attached to racks.

Cases are placed directly onto the pallet, and the voice system sends the selector on to the next pick. Some of the walkie riders also can hold two pallets at a time, reducing the number of trips an associate needs to make through the bulk areas.

Picking in the low-unit-of-measure area is similar, except that items are placed into totes on a wheeled cart. Each cart can hold up to 15 totes at a time, so batch picking can be performed on many of the orders. Similar to the case picks, the voice system directs the selector to the location of a needed item. The worker reads off the last three digits of the product number, and the voice system then provides instructions on which tote or totes should receive the product.

Additionally, the system may also prompt the worker to read off an expiration date for the product to assure that items selected still maintain needed shelf life.

Since moving to voice for picking its products, Seneca Medical has improved picking productivity by 25 percent overall in the facility, while more than doubling productivity in the each picking area – all with maintaining nearly perfect accuracy at a time when sales have increased dramatically.

The voice system, which paid for itself in less than six months, saves Seneca Medical \$1 million per year in operating costs. "There is no doubt that it was a good decision," says Price. "We have been able to avert adding people when our volumes increased."



To see a video of picking with Honeywell Vocollect voice at Seneca Medical's distribution center in Tiffin, Ohio, go to dcvtv.com and click on the Velocity Video.