

VELOCITY VIDEO CASE HISTORY

A DC VELOCITY SPEED CHALLENGE

Building better distribution

A voice system now directs nearly all handling tasks at Parksite's nine facilities for distributing building supplies.

BUILDING MATERIALS CAN BE AMONG THE MOST DIFFICULT items to distribute due to their weight and bulkiness.

It's difficult to hold a scanner or a piece of paper and pick up a long piece of lumber at the same time. Technology that is hands-free provides a huge advantage in handling these items.

And that's where Parksite has found a competitive edge.

Parksite is a distributor of high-end building materials to lumberyards and home improvement retailers, including Lowe's and The Home Depot. The employee-owned firm operates nine distribution centers, mostly in the East and Midwest, to provide customers with lumber, decking, molding, trim, and other common construction materials.

The company had relied on radio-frequency (RF) scanners to perform many of the functions at its facilities, but after seeing a presentation on voice-directed technology at the ProMat Show in 2013, Jim Coulter, Parksite's director of supply chain, knew a change was needed.

"I realized we had gotten as much improvement out of RF as we were going to get. We were looking for something that could provide continuous improvement," he recalls. "There are a lot of advantages to voice. For one thing, it's safer. It's also faster and more accurate because you don't have to ever take your eyes off the product."

Parksite partnered with Speech Interface Design, a company that specializes in voice system design and integration. "They are a great partner and are very flexible to work with. They made sure the system was configured to meet our needs," says Coulter. "They also brought some process improvements that we would not otherwise have thought of."

FINDING THEIR VOICE

Speech Interface Design set up a voice pilot program at Parksite's Baltimore facility in February 2014. The pilot centered on picking

products. "It showed significant productivity and accuracy improvements, so we decided to do a full implementation using voice in our Illinois facility," says Coulter.

The full implementation included using Honeywell Vocollect voice to direct picking, packing, receiving, putaway, truck loading, and cycle counting. The system has since been rolled out to the company's other facilities. Later this year, Parksite also plans to begin using voice to direct replenishment tasks.

"The biggest benefit of the voice system is that it's eyes-up and hands-free," explains Coulter. He says that not having to look at a device while driving a forklift is much safer and saves time. Having hands free to deal with heavy products is also a safer practice. Additionally, operators previously had to get off the forklifts to scan bar codes. Now the operator saves time by merely speaking a check digit into his microphone to verify a product's location.

The voice system works equally well outside the distribution building in the lumber and materials yard. Associates wear a Honeywell Vocollect device that is purpose-built for voice along with a wireless headset. "The Vocollect Talkman voice devices are certainly more rugged than your typical RF device would be, so that was very important to us," says Coulter.

The solution that Speech Interface Design provided also features real-time internal visibility and control via dashboards. A load-planning module has also improved the loading process to ensure the right product is placed in the right location on the right truck. The result has been improved accuracy that customers have noticed.

Since moving from RF to voice, Parksite has seen productivity increase more than 22 percent. Accuracy is best in class at 99.98 percent-plus, and the training time for new employees has been reduced from two-three weeks with RF down to only two days with voice. Parksite realized a full return on its investment in a little over seven months.



To see a Velocity Video of the Honeywell Vocollect voice solution from Speech Interface Design in action at Parksite's Hartford distribution center, go to dctv.com and click on Channel 2.