

Christmas Tradition brings warehousing operations up to speed with proVision

Christmas Tradition has been a long-standing successful supplier of gift décor. While the company managed its distribution functions manually for many years, continued growth led to a move to larger facilities that included warehousing, distribution and a new showroom. At the same time, it decided to implement an automated warehouse optimization strategy using proVision WMS. The result was improved distribution functions, improved pick accuracy, reduced labour costs, and the ability to maintain its sterling reputation for outstanding customer service.

■ THE CHALLENGE

According to Bruce Wright, President, the company was reaching a point whereby traditional manual paper based processes were not efficient enough to manage increasing volumes. "As we reached our busier season, we had thousands of new SKUs that needed to be received, recorded and placed in the warehouse. This put direct pressure on staff to re-organize the warehouse to find space for the new items.

"At the same time, we had to pick and ship orders," he adds. "Too often our pickers would reach a location without sufficient inventory for an order. They would have to stop the pick and inform our stockers (fork lift operators) of the situation. The stockers would then look up where the overstock for that item was stored and go to replenish the pick location. Not only was this disruptive for the stockers, but also slowed our entire order picking process."

Wright notes that the company reached a point where their paper-based process couldn't keep up. "It was becoming operationally impossible."

In addition, the warehouse was experiencing picking errors due to the fact that it shipped items as an each, inner or case, adds Ann Cawthra, Customer Service. "During peak season, orders for an inner were sometimes going out as a case or an each causing issues with our customers"

■ THE SOLUTION

Wright decided it was time to implement a comprehensive Warehouse Management System (WMS) to improve warehouse and distribution functionality. In early 2010 he began working with proVision to tailor a solution to fit its requirements.

proVision is a software developer and integrator of distribution management solutions, specializing in warehouse, transportation and eCommerce automation. The proVision WMS (Warehouse Management Solution) is designed to connect information and resource management while coordinating order fulfillment, customer service, labor costs and decision-making. Customizable and scalable, proVision WMS also provides a blueprint that allows companies to create their own workflow system. The WMS was rolled out at the end of June 2010 following a round of training, just in time for the Christmas inventory "rush" which runs from July 1 to October 15.

"When we saw the proVision solution we knew it was the right choice for our operation," Wright says. "We could see conceptually that it could deliver huge benefits for us in terms of accuracy and efficiency. proVision was also able to understand our needs, and make the appropriate changes to match our workflow. That was critical, since our requirements were different from larger fulfillment houses that ship by skidload. We needed someone that could apply a mega solution to a micro situation, and the proVision system did that perfectly."



ABOUT CHRISTMAS TRADITION

Christmas Tradition was established in 1983 as a wholesaler of quality giftware and décor, specializing in quality German mouth-blown glass Christmas ornaments. The company quickly grew from a one-man operation to encompass a full range of Christmas products, as well as giftware lines for all seasons. Christmas Tradition has always prided itself on its ability to maintain a hands-on and personal approach to fulfilling its customers' needs. In January 2010, the company opened a new 40,000 sq. ft. location to accommodate its ever-expanding warehousing and distribution requirements.

Cawthra notes, "There were adjustments to be made in terms of interfacing the system with order entry and other back end processes. We wanted our warehouse staff to have every possible piece of information necessary in order to make an informed decision."

As part of the implementation, proVision worked with Christmas Tradition to adapt the WMS with the order entry operating system to ensure seamless integration with order entry, invoicing, order release and other back-end functions

THE RESULT

Wright reports that the visibility gained using the proVision WMS 'dashboard' has helped the company to become proactive in terms of order management and workflow changes. "It's the first screen we see in the morning; and provides a snapshot view of preselected information and activities in the warehouse so we can make better decisions without effecting order throughput."

The Demand Analysis report is also a great tool to plan for the next day's activity, Cawthra adds. With this feature, Christmas Tradition can determine the night before whether they have enough inventory in their pick face locations for the next day's orders; and proactively move appropriate quantities from bulk (overstock) down to the pick face for those items determined to lack sufficient inventory. That eliminates the need for pickers to stop mid-order to wait for additional inventory to be moved from overstock. "The only orders released are those that we know are ready for picking. We can also look in the system to get an update on the status of an order and see at what stage it's at and when it will be ready for packing and invoicing."

Another great feature of the system is that it helps track performance, she adds. "We can tell who did the picking, the total dollar value per picker, the number of items, where the items came from, and how long it took to pick the order. That's a big plus when customers are making inquiries. All that information gives you a nice workflow and you don't have to go through reams of reports to check for discrepancies."

The proVision system can also prevent warehouse staff from 'cherry picking' the orders they want, she adds. "That's important when you use a lot of temp workers like we do. We can identify those workers that might need retraining so they're back up-to-speed quickly." This improved workflow and performance tracking proved especially critical during the peak Christmas inventory delivery times since shipping windows are extremely tight.

Wright anticipates that the proVision WMS solution will also prove beneficial when annual inventory tracking begins in April. "Usually two stockers would have to count up to 500 products a day. By the time our next annual inventory comes up this time, we won't even have to count. With cycle counting, we know everything we have and where it is. I'm looking forward to getting that on a regular routine. In fact with the proVision solution, we can reduce the number of stockers throughout the year by 50%, and improve picking efficiency by 30% or better."

He also reports that receiving time has already been cut in half. "With multiple containers arriving from Asia each week, we had space restrictions in the receiving area, so product used to be put away before its location was noted, causing all kinds of issues later. Now we can scan the barcodes on the products as they come in and then scan the barcode on the location when we put away the new inventory. In that way, the system knows where that inventory is when we need it later, saving us all kinds of searching and manual data entry. And when we move inventory, we simply scan the barcode on the 'from' location and then the barcode on the 'to' location and the system keeps track of it. That provides us with all kinds of efficiency gains without the need for manual paperwork."



ABOUT proVision WMS

proVision WMS is a developer and integrator of warehouse management solutions.

Providing integrated warehouse automation and management capabilities, proVision WMS serves public and private warehouses as well as 3PL organizations.

We understand the daily challenges faced by our clients and provide software and hardware solutions that make businesses more profitable and competitive. proVision WMS' warehouse management solutions are turnkey from start to finish. We provide project management, implementation and support of all our software and hardware solutions to ensure the highest levels of quality, systems performance, and your complete satisfaction.