Codeworks Rides Herd On Efficiency In Dallas With RFID

Client

The Shippers Group manages 10 food-grade facilities in both Texas and Georgia. Their 250 customers include eight of the largest shippers in Wal-Mart's "Top 100."

As the region's largest multi-vendor consolidator for Wal-Mart, The Shippers Group fulfills 750 Wal-Mart orders each month totalling 6.3 million pounds.

Square Footage

In excess of five million.

Products

- Codeworks Warehouse and Distribution Logistics System (WDLS)
- Codeworks "Traffic" TMS
- T. L. Ashford labelling software
- Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) tags
- Radio Frequency (RF) scanners
- Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) interfaces to existing systems

Overview

Wal-Mart is an international retail industry leader known for their rock-bottom prices. But keeping prices low also requires the retailer to continually be on the lookout for new ways to maximize its supply chain efficiencies.

When Wal-Mart saw a way to improve supplier visibility and provide product tracking all the way to the sales floor, they were sold on the idea of Radio Frequency Identification (RFID). Now they needed to shop for a pilot group to help with the rollout. Eight customers of The Shippers Group were selected.

The Challenge

Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) is a technology that stores and remotely retrieves product data automatically using an applied RFID tag/transponder. The weak link in the chain, however, is in coupling the tag readers and transferred data with the balance of the supply chain.

In this case, the success of the Shippers project depended upon quick compliance and accurate data transfer into the warehouse management system. Moreover, the case and pallet-level tag information would have to be correlated with each shipment.

Although exchanging electronic information with a large percentage of their customers was not new for Shippers, they saw greater opportunities on the horizon. They could leverage their existing technology investments in conjunction with this new technology to help their other clients become RFID-compliant. Moreover, they could add RFID-compliant labeling as a value-added service to win new business.

A number of complex tasks needed to be addressed in short order, though. Hardware for creating, encoding and reading RFID labels needed to be purchased, and the nascent technology needed to support future upgrades. Software logic needed to be developed for constructing each tag's 96-bit serialized electronic product codes (EPC). Logic was also needed to capture and record information as tags passed by readers and portals. Finally, logic was required for correlating tags to specific products and shipments. In short, integrating RFID with the rest of the supply chain integration needed to be built from the ground up.

"Our timeframe was small and our challenge was substantial. We were fortunate to have an experienced 3PL partner like Codeworks on our team. Their vision and flexibility were integral to our success."

Ken Johnson,
President

The Solution

Although several stand-alone products were being considered, an integrated solution was the better choice. And since The Shippers Group manages their operation with an integrated solution from Codeworks, this proven platform was the logical choice.

Analyzing Wal-Mart's current operation was the first step, with site visits to both distribution centers and retail stores. Hardware was reviewed, selected and implemented. These networked, real-time RFID readers also provided a path for future upgrades.

The core capabilities of the Codeworks warehouse management software were enhanced in a number of ways:
- RFID tags could now be encoded and decoded
- RFID reader events for each product code were captured and stored, real-time, in an event database
- EDI transactions for importing product data were expanded to include the new elements for each SKU.

The solution also included documentation and training on applying RFID labels to products, scanning and capturing pallet configurations for advance shipment notifications. Codeworks was pleased to provide business consulting, comprehensive solutions and training to satisfy the needs of both The Shippers Group and Wal-Mart.

The Results

The Shippers Group needed the competitive advantage of integrated RFID tagging capabilities in their operations. Partnering with Codeworks provided a solution for their existing tier-one customers as well as a value-added service for other customers facing compliance mandates.

Since the initial implementation, Shippers was able to replicate the solution to additional facilities with minimal costs. RFID capabilities are now included in the core capabilities they offer to all new customers.

"We knew that partnering with Codeworks was the right decision. Proven solutions, delivered by professionals. There really is no substitute for experience."

*Dave Eastman,
General Manager*

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