Construction Materials Manufacturer

Diversified manufacturer of premium building products enhances visibility into warehouse operations with RFgen Mobile Foundations for SAP.

At a glance...

Industry
Construction

Applications
Inventory Management
Warehouse Management
Sales Order Processing

Environment
SAP 6.0

The Challenge

A U.S.-based diversified manufacturer and supplier of premium building products for commercial and residential construction wanted to modernize its material handling and warehouse operations. The company decided to transition from a legacy, in-house application to SAP Warehouse Management along with an automated data collection solution, RFgen Mobile Foundations for SAP.

The company's legacy warehouse system was home grown and built for the specific needs of one plant, but as the company grew and added multiple locations, that system started to have issues with stability. Since the company already relied on SAP, it made sense to implement a combination of SAP Warehouse Management and a mobile data collection solution.

The Solution

The company wanted to choose a mobile data collection solution that would enable material handlers to capture information on the fly, without forcing material handlers to return to a computer workstation to enter information.

The company chose RFgen Mobile Foundations for SAP. RFgen's SAP-certified integration ensures the full suite of prebuilt, customizable apps will share data seamlessly with SAP Warehouse Management. In the warehouse and on the production floor, RFgen enhances productivity and reduces errors by enabling employees to complete tasks with mobile devices and rapid barcode scanning.

The company approached RFgen implementation in two phases—first adding mobile data collection in the warehouse and later on the production floor. With this implementation strategy, the company wouldn't need to disrupt an entire plant at once, instead opting to work on the back-end warehouse side of the operation first.

RFgen®

The Result

Material handlers operate forklifts equipped with mobile tablets and barcode scanners that can scan accurately up to 30 feet away. Wi-Fi is available throughout the warehouses, so anywhere forklifts go, the operators can interact with SAP in real-time through RFgen. The goal is to keep employees on forklifts moving—without needing to dismount to scan or stop to type information on the tablets. RFgen has helped the company:

- Increase the accuracy and completeness of information going into SAP Warehouse Management.

- Instill greater accountability into the data collection process.

- Reduce misshipments at one facility to zero over a span of nine months.

- Empower material handlers to create most transactions by scanning barcodes from their forklift, without needing to type on the tablet.

- Reduce the time needed for new employees to become proficient material handlers from six months to about one week.

- Provide the IT department with a way to view mobile operations in real-time and offer technical support to the forklift operators.

- Enable IT to push updates to tablets and keep everyone working on the same software version.

Increased Accuracy and Accountability

RFgen can be customized to match any manufacturing or warehouse workflow. The company was able to improve its inventory management processes by increasing the accuracy and completeness of the data being collected. In the legacy system, employees had figured out work arounds for some of the data entry, so information was not as complete as it could have been. RFgen forces data collection at each step of the process, and that has enabled the company to hold employees to a greater level of accountability as well as gain better visibility into inventory control.

In the first plant that received RFgen, picking accuracy markedly improved. There was not a single misshipment in the first nine months of using RFgen, in spite of three new material handlers hired during that time period.

Improved Efficiency and Faster Employee Onboarding

The company uses RFgen for receiving, putaway, cycle counting, inventory transfers, picking and loading shipments, as well as other inventory inquiries and warehouse transactions. In all of these areas, RFgen and SAP Warehouse Management help employees work more efficiently.

The improved automation also helps new and temporary warehouse employees come up to speed much more quickly. In the past, material handlers mostly had to memorize the location of items in the warehouse. It took more than six months for a new hire to be able to work efficiently. With RFgen, new employees learn much faster and even temporary employees are able to learn to load trucks within one week.

Ease of IT Administration

Not only is RFgen much easier for new warehouse employees to learn and use, it is also easier for the IT team to administer and support. In the past, IT had to rely on end users in the distributed warehouses to update software on the tablets. RFgen allows the IT team to push updates instead. When material handlers arrive to work, they either accept the updates to their tablets or RFgen closes.

When needed, RFgen also enables IT to log into a session and view what material handlers are viewing on the forklift tablets. This feature of RFgen makes it easier to support employees, because IT can see any error codes the material handlers receive and communicate with them by pushing a message to one or more tablets.

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