



Wireless Warehouse Management System Software

Processor Gets Food Products to Market Flawlessly with Custom-Designed System from RF Pathways™

It would be hard to picture a more hectic facility than that of a processor of foods who services the restaurant industry, with heavy emphasis on meat that is cut and dressed on the premises. Product gets stored in its warehouse, is retrieved for processing into steaks, ribs and other cuts by the production group, then the remainder of is returned to storage. At the same time, such products as fish, chicken and vegetables are also being picked in the facility, and all items including the cuts are merged into orders on the shipping dock.

This is the scenario that plays itself out nightly at one major facility, and it relies upon software by RF Pathways™ to make sure it runs without a hitch. Since picking takes place in the early hours of the morning for shipments to arrive at the various restaurants by mid-morning at the latest, the system has to be absolutely foolproof and accurate. It must also make intelligent decisions on the fly, since there are no customers to call to discuss variances and substitutions at 4:00 a.m., and not to ship is simply not an option.

The critical functionality of the system is in how it captures the weight of product to be shipped, not just quantity, and its role in transforming product on the shop floor, to help ensure full operational flexibility. For example, a box of four New York steaks can be sold as a unit or divided into separate steaks, and if the warehouse runs out of individual steaks it can transform a box into four of them, and vice-versa. Additionally, fresh can be substituted with frozen, and the RF Pathways™ software ensures it is reported to the warehouse management system on the Unix host in an intelligent way, for pricing purposes.

The facility is over 100,000 square feet and is divided into separate cooler zones and freezer space for the storage of meat, fish, chicken and vegetables. As product enters the facility fresh from suppliers, the UCC 128 codes are scanned to capture product information and establish expiry dates. The codes are used for tracking the

product throughout its stay. There is almost total reliance on scanners for capturing and processing data prior to transfer to the host. Most of the operation is now RF based, with very few transactions from a PC console point of view. The facility is serviced by RF technology through five access points for the 2MB wireless LAN, with scanning by 4 Symbol truck-mount scanners and 16 hand-held scanners.

The reasons for choosing RF technology spearheaded by RF Pathways™ include the prevention of spoilage and the control of shrinkage. When shelf-life is measured in days, accurate tracking is essential to prevent spoilage. Product must not be misplaced in the warehouse at any time. In the days before RF Technology, it was not an uncommon occurrence for meat products to spoil, especially when multiple handling procedures were involved, such as in dealing with a side of beef. That's no longer the case. Interestingly, as well as solving the spoilage problem, the RF Pathways™ software is also instrumental in tracking the beef aging process.

Directs Make-To-Stock Activity, Too

There is also a make-to-stock element to production, such as when the warehouse determines that more lamb chops or other cuts are needed, to hold in inventory. Orders for the inventory are issued by the RF Pathways™ system through a function designed into the hand-held terminals. As well, the system accommodates all customization of finished products, or custom cuts, all the while maintaining intelligent communication with the host thanks to the programmed interface.

The RF Pathways™ system has been able to accommodate the portable scanners that previously were used in direct-connect mode to the host. This has minimized the expense of purchasing new scanning equipment. As well, the flexibility remains to switch back to direct-connect mode if necessary for a complete physical inventory, but the accuracy of the system means that such a switch will probably never be necessary.

RF Pathways™ specializes in warehouse management solutions and the application of Symbol products and technology, with more than 15 years' experience in the North American marketplace. Our strength is in the food industry with particular expertise in designing and implementing powerful, flexible interfaces with various WMS systems, including SAP. Our professional services group is ready to develop the perfect solution for you through a program of careful consultation and collaboration

that addresses your specific needs and delivers a truly rewarding return-on-investment for your company.

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