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Honeywell Voice Solution Case Study
Atlantic Grupa
Food

More picking, less walking

The Croatian FMCG producer and distributor Atlantic Grupa has raised its picking performance by around 20 percent by using the voice technology of Honeywell Vocollect Voice Solutions. The company has also reduced its error rate to 0.05 percent and laid the foundations for comprehensive data analysis and route optimisation.

Order picking is taxing: Stojan Pašalić knows this from his own experience. The Croatian Atlantic Grupa's supply chain development manager has already done a few shifts as an order picker in order to gain a better understanding of this process that is so arduous. The around 70 pickers who work three shifts in the central warehouse, opened in 2019 close to Zagreb, account for around 60 percent of the overall costs. At the same time, the order volume of the company that primarily operates in the food sector is growing by around 10 percent a year. In the meantime, some 350,000 to 400,000 picks have to be achieved per month.

70 new staff per season

"The growing number of orders cannot always be covered by hiring more personnel, especially as space to move around in the warehouse and availability on the labour market are limited," Pašalić says. Against this backdrop, he started to look for a solution in the spring of 2017 that would be able to significantly increase the picking performance with the existing workforce. In the warehouse location at the time, operations were already paperless, and each picker had a handheld device with an integrated scanner. "The employees didn't have their hands free because of the handhelds and had to switch between looking at the display, the merchandise and the aisles," is how Pašalić describes work as it was performed back then. This was frequently the cause of errors. In addition, the induction of new pickers and temporary staff took between four and six working days per employee. In the summer months especially, all this was virtually unachievable: In effect, Atlantic had to familiarise between 60 and 70 new colleagues with the technology during the peak phase.

Pašalić wanted to solve this problem through voice-controlled order picking and approached system house Špica Sustavi with this idea. The IT service provider which

operates in Croatia and 10 other European countries has provided Atlantic with support in the IT area for some years now, in particular with the issues to do with the Symphony Gold warehouse management system. Špica Sustavi accompanied the implementation of Symphony and set up the interface with the SAP ERP system used at Atlantic. The Honeywell Vocollect Voice Solution and its interaction with Symphony Gold was already known from other projects.

Short test phase

Converting to voice-controlled order picking went smoothly, also due to the commitment of Špica Sustavi, among other factors. "During the implementation phase I was able to reach my contacts at any time, even on a Sunday, and the will to succeed was tangible," says Pašalić, remembering the process. As early as September 2017, Atlantic was able to introduce the pick-by-voice solution in Zagreb and explain the new system to the employees. "Learning how to use the new system now takes only two hours per employee", affirms Pašalić, with around 30 minutes dedicated to creating the individual voice profile. In this phase, each employee speaks instructions and commands into the headset's microphone in his own personal tone and dialect. These data are stored in the system and are then used in subsequent communication between the picker and the Honeywell Vocollect Voice Solution.

As soon as the voice profile has been created, the employee starts to apply it in practice: After a short test phase of 60 to 90 minutes, processing the first orders is already possible. These orders are initially transferred from SAP to Symphony Gold and converted there into specific picking orders. They are then sent via WLAN to the voice device which goes by the name of Talkman. This device converts speech into the voice commands which are then sent by bluetooth to the headset of the operator. The voice commands consist of the location in the warehouse and the number of articles to be retrieved. To ensure that the picker is in the right place in the warehouse, he must first read the check digit there.

Quickly accepted

The harmonious and efficient integration of hearing, seeing, picking and speaking proved its worth at Atlantic within a very short time. "Our employees now have both hands free and can concentrate fully on picking," says Pašalić, and adds: "The Honeywell Vocollect Voice Solution has raised our picking performance by around 20 percent and reduced our error rate to 0.05 percent." Not only Atlantic is delighted about this, but also the pickers who are paid for the large part according to their performance and error rates. No wonder the employees quickly accepted the new solution and like working with it.

Another key advantage consists in the data evaluations that are now possible. "Through analysing our picking processes, we were able to calculate for the first time exactly how much time was taken up by picking, moving around the warehouse and other activities," Pašalić reports. In the process he ascertained that only around 35 percent of the working hours was accounted for by picking and between 55 and 60 percent for moving around between the aisles. "If one considers that our 70 pickers at the Zagreb location generate 60 percent of our overall costs, we have a huge savings potential here," Pašalić emphasises. With this in mind, the logistics manager has already launched the next project: With the aid of artificial intelligence and machine learning, he wants to adapt the warehouse layout and the positions of the merchandisers dynamically to the respective demand situation. In taking this measure, Atlantic intends to raise the proportion of picking in the working hours from 35 to at least 40 percent, and to cover the Atlantic Grupa's future growth with the existing core workforce.

60 data collectors

Consequently, each Talkman becomes a valuable generator of data for Atlantic. In Zagreb alone, 40 A730 Talkman devices and just as many wireless SRX 2 headsets are in use. Another 20 sets were procured for the Split location where the solution was also implemented. This equipment is supplemented by a personalised headset microphone which is plugged into the electronic module of the headset at the start of each shift. The headset microphone encapsulates a personal NFC chip which enables the right speech profile to be recognised and loaded. This is done by the employee holding the Talkman and the headset together for a short while before starting to work. The two devices recognise each other and form a logical unit.

Conclusion: Through the Honeywell Vocollect Voice Solution, Atlantic benefits not only from minimised error rates, an enhanced pick performance and shorter induction periods for new employees – with the aid of the data collected and artificial intelligence, the production and trading company will also be able to optimise routes in the warehouse.

Quote:

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Voice results

Goals:
- Minimised error rate
- Increased productivity
- Improved working conditions
- Greater employee satisfaction
- Extension to other warehouses

Application:
Voice Solution for order picking

Installation:
- 60 SRX2 headsets
- 60 A730 Talkman
- VoiceCatalyst 2.1 voice control software
- VoiceConsole 5.x

Results:
20 percent more picking performance
- Induction period of four days reduced to 2 hours
- Exact analysis of picking processes

- Database for the targeted optimisation of routes and picking times with AI
- Optimal ergonomics
- Minimum error rate of 0.05 percent