

Puma



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At a glance

Industry: Consumer Goods

Application: Tracking & Tracing

Products: Intermec CN3

Right item, right place, right recipient

Company overview

Intermec handheld computers take the load off Puma's Scandinavian central warehouse.

Puma, one of the world's premier sporting goods brands, is increasing the efficiency of its central Scandinavian warehouse and Intermec handheld computers have played a key role in the process of switching from paper-based to automatic warehouse management. The result is outstanding and today deliveries are now 99 per cent accurate.

Puma's Scandinavian central warehouse is located in Helsingborg in southern Sweden. Over 18,000 sports items are stored in 12,000 square metres. With approximately 70 employees and two work shifts, the warehouse dispatches approximately 30,000 items a day. The items are shipped directly to retailers around Sweden, Norway, Finland and the Baltic states.

In a short space of time the number of stored items has grown and with it the size of the warehouse too. In fact turnover has increased from SEK200 millions to SEK1 billion in just six years.

Up until two years ago all warehouse management was handled using a paper-based system. Synchronisation between restocking from the buffer to picking worked badly and the number of incorrect deliveries and complaints was unacceptably high. A lack of organisation

in handling this had a negative effect on all divisions within the company – from customer service and the returns department all the way up to the management team.

Puma's new warehouse management is completely automated. Picking of incoming and outgoing deliveries and inventory are conducted using barcodes and handheld computers synched with a wireless network via a central server. The result of the changeover from paper to paperless has been extremely positive for all employees. Today 99 per cent of deliveries are correct.

Strong demand for a modern solution

In 2006 the Scandinavian central warehouse received a new corporate directive namely to reduce paper flow and make the warehouse management system more efficient. Those responsible for implementing these instructions quickly realised that what they needed was a reliable solution with good accessibility.

"To enable us to be as flexible as possible we didn't want to overcomplicate matters, which in itself places high demands on security," says Jörgen Larsson, Communications and Security Manager for Puma Nordic and Baltic. "A centrally operated Cisco-certified solution was the answer to our needs and that was where DataFångst, our hardware supplier, came into the picture."

A number of suppliers were invited to present their solutions but when compact, practical handheld computers was agreed as being the key requirement, most suppliers fell by the wayside due to their large, clumsy units. Through its partnership with Intermec, DataFångst could offer exactly that - a compact, Cisco-compatible handheld computer in the Intermec CN3. Today 45 CN3 units run faultlessly and at full power ever day from 05.30am to midnight.

"The fact that we chose Intermec handheld computers came about above all because we know from experience that their range of products has the edge," says Ulf Jerlebo, Vice CEO and Head of Sales at DataFångst. "Our collaboration has always been reliable and positive."

A system that monitors

Since the CN3's implementation at Puma's warehouse, a number of benefits have been realised already. Just a week after the handheld computers were implemented, the number of complaints dropped substantially - with a simultaneous reduction in the time it took to handle them - and there were very few incorrect deliveries.

"We can organise incoming and outgoing deliveries in a completely different manner than before," says Jörgen Larsson. "Advance planning and scheduling are very important in this industry. Since shops often have limited storage space, we have to be able to synchronise our deliveries with their needs. The deliveries cannot come either too early or too late."

For Puma, where there are a relatively high proportion of part-time staff, the automated system has been a real asset. Familiarity with, and deep knowledge of,

the warehouse are no prerequisites in order for Puma staff to work productively. Today the Intermec CN3 handheld computer automatically identifies the correct bay and confirms that the scanned goods correspond with the order - something that naturally also makes the work of experienced staff members more efficient as well.

"The CN3 is incredibly flexible, easy to adapt in its design and also very usable in warehouse environments, where it is vital that the handheld terminals are able to handle a large number of items - both in terms of incoming and outgoing deliveries," says Fredrik Lindqvist, Country Manager at Intermec Scandinavia.

The system also checks that there is a supply of goods available for picking at all times. If not, an order is immediately sent to the truck, which fetches them from the buffer. Previously in order for goods to be restocked the picker had to inform the truck driver, which often resulted in staff having to sit and wait for goods to be restocked.

"It is like comparing night and day," according to Jörgen Larsson. "Absolutely everything is better and more time-efficient. Take inventory for example: previously our staff had to write out every item number, which was incredibly time-consuming. Today the terminals take care of that part as well as storing all of the data."

Around the warehouse there are 17 Cisco access points. These are connected to a central server which can be viewed by warehouse staff in their handheld computers' web windows. At various times the central server releases orders wirelessly, which the users receive on

their respective units. If there are long order lists, they are automatically divided up among two or three pickers and then synchronised back together at the end.

The staff involved in the development

Today Puma's people work using personal handheld computers that they have signed for, which also helps instil them with a sense of responsibility for servicing and maintenance of the machines. The workforce is therefore very careful with their units.

In addition, the users have been actively involved in the units' development - applications, options and buttons to a large extent have been shaped by their stated needs and preferences. The 'dare to ask' button featured on the terminals being a prime example of this.

"Previously when an item ended up on the floor it was seldom, if ever, picked up by a staff member because they were concerned about putting it back on the wrong shelf," says Jörgen Larsson. "Thanks to 'dare to ask' the problem doesn't exist any more. Today the employee can scan the item with their handheld computer; the screen then displays the item's correct location in the warehouse and the staff member can put the item back in its proper place."

Puma is looking forward to further enhancements to the system. It is hoped that IP-telephony -- using telephones and making calls over the existing access points may be the next step in the development. At present though, everyone is extremely happy with the warehouse system and the possibilities that have been opened up in it and by it. Use of paper-based systems is now minimal, picking errors virtually non-existent and both staff and customers are happy.

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