Vocollect Case Study

Balford Farms

Regional Dairy and Speciality Foods Distributor

Voice Results

📖 Objectives
- Increase accuracy
- Improve productivity
- Increase better management of DC
- Increase customer satisfaction

📖 Application
- Order selection

📖 Installation
- Internally developed WMS
- Vocollect Voice
- Vocollect SR Series Headsets™
- Vocollect Talkman® T2 Mobile Computing Devices

📖 Results
- Productivity & accuracy gains in warehouse, deliveries, & accounting
- Mispicks cut significantly
- Training time reduced significantly

📖 ROI
- Payback in less than 12 months

📖 Future Plans
- Put-away Voice Application
- Replenishment Voice Application

Vocollect Voice® Transforms Balford Farms from Backend Order Selection to Frontline Workers

Balford Farms is the Tri-State area's oldest privately-owned and operated independent dairy distributor serving Eastern Pennsylvania and New Jersey since 1892. They offer their customers an extensive line of refrigerated dairy, cheese, ice cream mixes and specialty products that no other full-line dairy in the Tri-State area can match. Balford is committed to achieving real and sustained growth by anticipating and responding to their customers' needs. With approximately 200 employees and over $70 million in annual revenues, Balford offers a product line in excess of 1,000 dairy-related and specialty food products, specializing in complete lines of milk, cream, ice cream mixes, drinks, cheeses and gourmet foods.

The company services over 6,000 institutions ranging from nationwide convenience stores, multinational coffee retailers and national frozen dessert retailers, to nursing homes, schools, colleges, 'mom and pop' stores and restaurants. Balford encompasses the entire movement of product from the receipt of, to the loading of trucks, through the delivery to its customers.

Supported by Vocollect Voice, Balford Farms' ensures that products are properly received, stored, inventoried and expedited to customers in the most accurate and efficient manner possible.

The Challenge
Improve Overall Management of DC

According to Wayne Baldwin, chief information officer for Baldwin Farms, prior to implementing Vocollect Voice, they were working with paper-based load manifests and errors were being made.

"We had three different categories of order selection and our load sheets average four pages, with over 30 items per page," explained Baldwin. "It was very easy for our workers to accidentally miss lines, and reconciling the sectioned load sheets from multiple pickers was confusing. Occasionally, inaccurate orders were loaded on trucks with no correct documentation to support what should have been loaded. To make matters worse, our workers operate in refrigerated environments wearing safety-helmets, which often impairs their vision when having to read the load sheets. We understood that mistakes could happen; but we knew we had to change."

"I'm amazed at how inexpensive Vocollect Voice really is. Without it, our workers were prone to mistakes, but with it, we're always dead-on in our order accuracy. With the amount of money it's saving, we've easily achieved payback within a year."

Wayne Baldwin
Chief Information Officer
Balford Farms

The Approach

Vocollect Voice Improves Accuracy & Productivity

Baldwin contacted Vocollect and attended its 'DC Performance Series' event in Princeton, and liked what he saw. He initiated an onsite meeting with Vocollect, which didn't waste time in getting its technical team involved. "I was concerned because our warehouse management system (WMS) is home-grown; we operate mainframe computers with every aspect of our process custom-designed," said Baldwin. "But Vocollect demonstrated how to easily interface voice with our WMS via Vocollect Voice."

With synchronization concerns behind him, Baldwin saw where DC workers could move fluidly from item to item, order to order, without constant eye movement to hardcopy, writing or stopping. "I've never experienced such an 'instant sell' in my life," he said. "I knew we could implement Vocollect Voice – and that somehow, we would do it."

He took his proposal to the corporate partners, convinced them it would work – and they agreed. They kicked-off implementation with a two-week pilot co-managed by Vocollect, operating 1-1/2 DC shifts with trucks dispatched over multiple separate shifts.

Because they literally customize order selection techniques to accommodate a vast assortment of clientele special needs, Balford Farms does not handle order selection in any standard manner.
"We now do various automated picking sequences – by route, by customer, and a combination of route/customer. This new process saves time. We're more productive and efficient, but not just in warehouse or on routes – we're seeing the effect all the way to accounting." With regard to worker acceptance and training, Baldwin describes that when they hire someone, the DC manager puts them on voice and they're productive immediately. "During the pilot," said Baldwin, "we intentionally employed a relatively new hire on voice and Vocollect was so intuitive he was working efficiently within minutes."

And Vocollect is dynamic allowing the propagation of existing concepts.
"On the paper load sheets, we'd tell order selectors how many stacks of an item to select; how many cases and how many loose units," said Baldwin. "Voice gave us the flexibility to devise new concepts for sending individual lines to accommodate unique order selection."

Today, there are 13 workers utilizing Vocollect Voice concurrently for order selection. As the company continues to grow, it plans to expand. "We want to bring voice into put-away and replenishment applications in the long-term," said Baldwin. "Our growing business dictates that we keep an open mind toward expanding our warehouses both locally and remotely and without question, Vocollect Voice will be part of every Balford DC."

The Results

Efficiency from the Backend to the Frontline

Balford Farms attributes Vocollect Voice to vastly improving accuracy and productivity across the board. But the results go one step further – impressing its DC managers, union workers and drivers.

"Vocollect just makes my job that much easier and also improves customer satisfaction," said George Call, a route person for Balford Farms and member of Teamsters local 463. "I've steadily seen accuracy on loads increase with the installation of Vocollect." George is very happy that Balford has committed to improving order fulfillment – "Vocollect Voice is that good," he said. According to Baldwin, "Our DC managers said, 'Don't ever get rid of this. We don't want to go back to paper.'

With regard to payback, Baldwin has been equally impressed. "It's tough for us to put a number on ROI," he explained, "But I'm amazed at how inexpensive Vocollect Voice really is. Without it, our workers were prone to mistakes. But with it, we're always dead-on in our order accuracy. With the amount of money it's saving, we've easily achieved payback within a year. To me, there's no better metric than that."

About Vocollect

Vocollect, a business unit of Intermec, is the number one provider of voice solutions for mobile workers worldwide, helping customers achieve a higher level of business performance through voice. Every day Vocollect enables over 300,000 workers worldwide to distribute more than $3.5 billion dollars' worth of goods from distribution centers and warehouses to customer locations. A global team of over 2,000 supply chain reseller and channel partner experts supports Vocollect Voice offerings in 60 countries and in over 35 languages. Vocollect's VoiceWorld Suite integrates with all major WMS and ERP systems, including SAP, and supports the industry's leading mobile device solutions.

For more information, visit www.vocollect.com