

**COMPANY: WHSMITH**  
**INDUSTRY: SPECIALITY RETAIL**

## **VOICE POWERED RESULTS:**

### **OBJECTIVES**

- /// **Increase warehouse productivity**
- /// **Achieve near perfect accuracy**
- /// **Optimise use of warehouse resources**
- /// **Improve quality of service to stores**

### **RESULTS**

- /// **Increased productivity: daily pick levels up by 25%**
- /// **Improved accuracy: incoming reports of delivery errors fallen by 80% per week**
- /// **Greater visibility of pick status**
- /// **Enhanced flexibility in resources allocation throughout the warehouse**



*"...we were up and running in almost no time at all, as there was no requirement for a complete overhaul of the systems and processes we were used to."*

**Eddie McGrotty,**  
Supply Chain Finance Director, WHSmith

### **Quality of service through innovation**

WHSmith's highly successful travel group comprises 210 outlets in airports, train stations, bus stations and hospitals throughout the UK, stocking everything from books and stationery, magazines and confectionary, to travel essentials and high ticket items such as cigarettes.

This division prides itself on delivering the right merchandise in the right quantities to meet the needs of its clientele. In this way it sets standards that are carried through the entire group. The use of leading edge technologies is one such standard, which is why WHSmith Travel's warehouse in Holford, Birmingham recently installed Voice-Directed Distribution™.

## THE CHALLENGE:

### To provide a fast and reliable service for regional stores

The retail group recognises that efficiency within central warehouse operations provides the key to delivering a service that is second to none at the registers. When stores are able to rely upon the accuracy and timeliness of their stock deliveries, as well as to trust that their distribution queries will be met with a rapid response, the result filters down to the service they are able to offer their customers.

## THE SOLUTION:

### Voice technology for order pickers

In late March 2004 voice reseller VoiteQ completed a rollout of the Vocollect Voice-Directed Distribution system for 50 WHSmith users on the warehouse floor.

*Talkman*® system allows order pickers to receive picking instructions via their headsets, confirming picks as they go by reading back the last three digits of the product EAN code to ensure accuracy. WHSmith especially relies upon the 'description' command for clarification within the book section, where several different titles share the same pickface location. This simple call for additional details prevents a mis-pick that might formerly have easily occurred. There are also valuable knock-on benefits to other areas. Should a picker arrive at an empty location, the 'short' command advises the system that the shelves need to be replenished.

This information is picked up by the WMS and passed on to the replenishment team for action. By the time the picker returns to this station at the end of the job, the problem is rectified.

## THE RESULTS:

### Greater accuracy and efficiency in the warehouse

The result is a step up in the general pace of work, with the users themselves controlling the speed of the flow of instructions from their systems. Most notably, accuracy is up to around 99.9 percent with voice picking.

"It is impossible to pick the wrong item," said McCafferty.

"If a user provides an incorrect barcode the system will not progress until the correct code is given. It also asks for quantity verification, to ensure the correct amount has been collected." Naturally, improved pick accuracy means that far less resources are spent on tracking down and verifying system and delivery errors. Add to that the overall increase in profitability due to productivity levels going up and the financial case for voice is compelling. During the first month of operation at WHSmith, estimated daily pick levels rose per person from 561 to 701. Moreover, since accuracy levels at WHSmith are much higher, the retailer has been able to completely dispense with quality control staff within the Holford warehouse. Those previously employed with on-the-spot order checks have been reintegrated into the picking team, providing valuable reinforcement in that area. There is also a lesser requirement for data processing staff than with manual picking methods, and the stores themselves no longer need to allocate resources to checking in their deliveries.

Furthermore, owing to improved accuracy, incoming reports of delivery errors have fallen from around 100 per week to less than twenty; even those relating to matters other than mis-picks. "We are delighted with this, as this project has always been about us finding a way to provide a better quality of service to the stores," stated McCafferty.

WHSmith's voice installation shows that the 'great British institution' still has what it takes to be a leader!

*"In just one month of using voice, even the self-confessed 'technophobes' within the organisation can't imagine life without it."*

**Jim McCafferty,**  
Site Manager, WHSmith



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