



CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

ECHO Inc. Achieves 99.9 Percent Distribution Accuracy, Better Customer Service with Mobile Printing

Outdoor Power Equipment Company Notes 35 Percent Faster "Pick" Process

About ECHO

For the past 30 years, ECHO Inc. has been a worldwide leader in the development and manufacture of professional-grade hand-held outdoor power equipment for both the commercial and residential markets. With manufacturing in the Chicago area, the company sells its chainsaws, trimmers and other power equipment through a nationwide network of distributors and dealers.

Challenge

ECHO parts and finished products—numbering more than 15,000—are housed in a 156,000-square-foot distribution center at the company's Lake Zurich, Ill., headquarters. Over the years, ECHO's distribution methods have evolved, increasingly becoming more efficient and customer-focused. ECHO has moved from picking products off a carousel and tagging them for shipping to picking with individual forklifts. Both approaches had their drawbacks in terms of efficiency and accuracy.

As the company's volume increased, it needed a more precise and clear method of picking and labeling to improve internal efficiency and customer satisfaction.

Solution

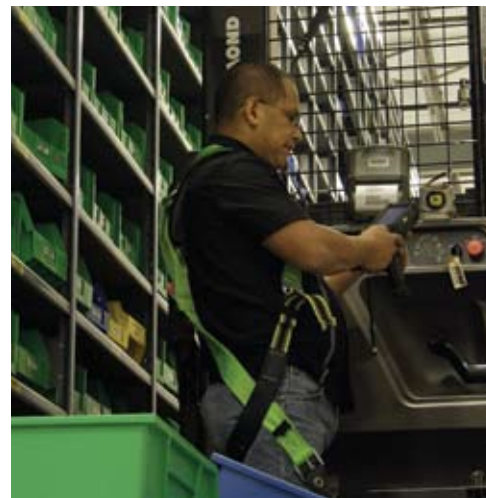
In the mid-'90s, ECHO implemented bar code printing in every step of its process, from manufacturing to receiving to labeling to picking and shipping. Later, the move to a wireless mobile bar code solution transformed its distribution center.

The company brought in Zebra® QL 420 Plus™ direct thermal mobile printers, which work wirelessly with Motorola® MC9090 handheld computers. The QL 420 Plus printer is specifically designed for complex mobile printing applications and built to handle increased levels of wireless security and to process complex labels.

With the printers and handheld computers, ECHO employees drive the aisles of the distribution center on forklifts with everything they need to pick and label products for shipping. ECHO employees use the handheld units and printers to generate the appropriate labels for each item, printing them on demand instead of from desktops before they go out onto the floor. Plus with wireless, printers are no longer tethered to scanners, giving them even greater flexibility.



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Customer

ECHO Inc.

Industry

Outdoor equipment

Challenge

Improve the speed and accuracy of product picking for distribution

Partner

Bar Code Integrators, Inc.

Solutions

- Zebra QL 420 Plus direct thermal mobile printer
- Motorola MC9090 handheld computers
- IBM iSeries servers

Results

- At least 35 percent improvement in efficiency in the picking process
- 99.9 percent pick accuracy
- Faster intake, better picking accuracy and improved customer service

The right asset. In the right place. At the right time.



Operators may be filling orders for multiple customers and products at once, so a forklift may have several containers for each order. Each container and picked product is scanned from the forklift to ensure that every item is accurately placed with the correct customer's order. Operators can also easily print a pack list to go into the shipment.

"Forklift labeling and scanning has improved our pick accuracy and also allowed us to fulfill multiple orders at the same time," said Tim Dorsey, vice president of systems and logistics at ECHO Inc.

Packing lists and clear external labeling ease the process for customers on the receiving end. With descriptive labeling on the outside, customers immediately know the contents of an incoming shipment.

To optimize its entire system, ECHO enlisted the help of Bar Code Integrators (BCI), a Zebra PartnersFirst Program member and one of the few Motorola professional services providers in the country. BCI surveyed the wireless network and helped ECHO maximize coverage throughout the warehouse. BCI also regularly reviews, tests and makes recommendations on the printers to improve bar code readability. That guidance, especially as ECHO has added to its system over the years, resulted in a cohesive, efficient process in the distribution center.

"Although our system was designed for integration from the beginning, over the years we added components add-hoc" said Bryan Burns, ECHO's IBM® iSeries® specialist. "BCI has made sure that everything integrates and operates the way it was designed so we could achieve better quality label printing."

Results

In the decade that ECHO has integrated Zebra printers into their operation, the company has only needed to replace a few units. They have proven to be exceptionally durable and stable in the distribution center—ensuring a high rate of return on the investment in each printer.

"There's no way we'd go to any other brand," Burns said.

Because forklift operators can fulfill multiple orders with a single trip down each aisle, they complete orders more quickly than with previous methods. Moreover, scanning of each part and matching that to destination boxes prevents errors.

"We've seen at least a 35 percent improvement in efficiency in our picking process and have 99.9 percent pick accuracy," Dorsey said.

Greater accuracy and clearer-labeled boxes and parts has produced fewer shortage and overage claims and enabled customers to process incoming orders more quickly. This has delivered a noticeable increase in ECHO's customer satisfaction.

"It's so easy for customers to handle the receiving process. Everything is already labeled and organized in packets," Dorsey said. "Mobile printing has absolutely been a competitive advantage for us."

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