

Shoe Zone's feat of logistics

Hands-free scanning technology has helped to double output for a leading UK shoe retailer, Shoe Zone. Its warehouse now handles 1,000,000 pairs of footwear per week and delivers to the company's 400 shoe stores in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

Challenge:

- Lengthy manual data-entry process of product codes for warehouse stock items
- Heavy reliance on printed packing lists which can get lost
- Short implementation time

Solution:

- Equipping warehouse workers with a mobile solution
- Zebra mobile QL 320™ bar code printers (for printing labels on demand for each filled warehouse carton)
- Motorola™ wrist-mounted computer and ring scanner
- All scanners, computers and printers link to Shoe Zone's host system
- The scanning software is integrated in real time to the company's stock-replenishment system

Benefits:

- Significant time savings
- Increased productivity and efficiency
- Enhanced accuracy levels
- Improved warehouse service to Shoe Zone's 400 retail stores

Replenishing the company's stores with new stock is a challenging process involving 120 pickers, working continual shifts from Sunday until Friday afternoon. New stock is taken to the warehouse during the week and loaded onto lorries that leave at various intervals from midday Sunday to Thursday night. Each lorry delivers to an average of five stores, with weekly deliveries covering all 400 retail stores.

System installation took place within seven weeks of agreeing the specification, and with no time for staff training, it was critical the new system worked first time.



Solution Technology

Zebra QL 320™ wireless mobile printers

Motorola™ wrist mounted computer and ring scanner





According to Nigel Humphries, Shoe Zone's IT Manager: "It was money well spent, and that opinion is echoed by the board. In this day and age, to have something delivered on time and in budget and to go live within a week of implementation is a rarity."

These scanners, computers and printers are linked with Shoe Zone's Unisys® Windows NT® host system via an 802.11b wireless switch radio network, and with software provided by a Zebra partner are integrated to Shoe Zone's stock-replenishment system in real time.

Consequently, weekly-generated stock orders are based on current trends and each store's previous performance. The orders are recognised by the software and sorted into efficient picking and loading schedules. Not only does this provide a stock audit trail, but equally useful data for management information.

A supervisor console (a standard PC running Windows NT) tracks the pickers' progress via a screen that can be accessed anywhere in Shoe Zone. This means anyone can see who has been sent to the warehouse, which store they are picking and how many units they have picked.

The new system has enabled Shoe Zone's warehouse to become the hub of its business. Instead of working from printed pick lists, Shoe Zone pickers now wear a scanner and a lightweight computer. Each new instruction appears on the display screen – but only after the operative has scanned the correct bar code for the previous task.

According to Nigel Humphries, the first week's picking after the new system's installation went surprisingly smoothly. "We had shops calling to say their delivery was 100% correct. We've never had that happen before." The introduction of this real-time scanning solution has introduced such a high accuracy level that Shoe Zone staff no longer have to examine deliveries to identify missing items.

Moreover, changing shifts is easier without having to rely on verbal or written instructions. In time, Shoe Zone will use the system to detect patterns in human error and productivity, and to monitor whether areas of the warehouse are being effectively restocked.

The system has saved staff considerable time. Previously, in order to achieve a clean despatch list for each store, warehouse staff had to manually key in the product codes of any stock the warehouse was unable to deliver. This meant there was always the risk of losing picking lists or entering codes incorrectly.

Thanks to the new system, Shoe Zone has significantly increased its overall efficiency and improved the service it provides to all its 387 stores throughout the UK and Republic of Ireland.

"The first week's picking after the new system's installation went surprisingly smoothly. We had shops calling to say their delivery was 100% correct. We've never had that happen before."

**Nigel Humphries
IT Manager, Shoe Zone**

