



Atlantic Can Company

AccellosOne Warehouse Management System Boosts Performance, Reliability In Atlantic Can Company Warehouse Operations

When it comes to making a purchase, consumers often opt for the product that looks the best. Nobody knows that better than Brian LeBlanc, co-owner and CEO of Atlantic Can Company, a Westhampton, N.J.-based company that years ago left behind its origins as a can manufacturer to distribute an extensive array of decorative tins, tin accessories and plastic tubs and trays that are designed to catch the eye.

Altogether, the company stocks some 2,500 SKUs in its 35,000 square foot warehouse, operating the facility with a peak user volume of 20 during the company's August-December busy season. Its customers range from confectionary giant Hershey to Utz Quality Foods, the largest independent privately held snack brand in the United States, and My Grandma's of New England, which distributes gourmet coffee cakes through large and small food retailers as well as less conventional mass outlets such as Amazon and the QVC home shopping network.

A stocking distributor, Atlantic Can sells to a clientele of some 4,500 confectionary and food manufacturers across North America – embellishing many of the items with custom artwork that it applies in its own silk-screening shop. Recently, the company also expanded into plastics with lines of transparent food containers, serving trays and serving bowls.

Over time, the company has looked to technology to support its operations – sometimes with more success than at others. But the acquisition of AccellosOne Warehouse Management System (WMS) in 2011 introduced new dimensions of performance and reliability that LeBlanc feels has now placed the company well ahead of its competition and even many of its vendors.

Operations

In its business model, Atlantic Can anticipates its customers' requirements and carries the products and quantities that likely will be

needed -- many of them seasonally oriented – normally shipping from stock but also able to command speedy delivery from its own vendors if necessary, LeBlanc says.

"Our stock turns over eight- to ten times over the course of a year, so our suppliers are very willing to accommodate our needs," he says.

In response to steadily increasing volume and complexity of the business as it grew, company upgraded to a new ERP system, a major improvement in terms of managing finances, but still lacking the ability to manage warehouse processes – particularly the storage, management and shipping of the company's extensive inventory.

"Our warehouse practices were not well organized," LeBlanc says.

"Putaway was a loose process in which we would assign approximate locations for the merchandise – like 'Aisle three, halfway down'. Picking and shipping orders could entail time-consuming wild-goose chases up and down multiple aisles to find the products."

Seeking Software Solutions

Atlantic purchased two solutions to deal with the problem: a barcoding system sought to match bin locations with a software map of the warehouse that resided in the second solution, a basic but somewhat limited inventory management system that communicated with the ERP software. Almost two disappointing years into the implementation effort, LeBlanc asked its I.T. vendor to remove the barcoding and inventory management software and to recommend a possible alternative.

The partner proposed that Atlantic explore the AccellosOne Warehouse Management System (WMS), cautioning that the company would be looking at a somewhat more costly solution. Undaunted, LeBlanc took a look, liked what he saw and made the purchase decision. Importantly, the software integrated easily with the ERP system already in use.

AccellosOne Warehouse Management Systems

FEATURES/BENEFITS

- Fast, uncomplicated implementation
- Positive control over 35,000 s.f. warehouse
- Seamless Integration with ERP
- Seamless integration with AccellosOne Ship
- Real-time operations throughout
- Directed putaway, picking processes
- Near-doubling of outbound shipments
- 25 percent personnel reduction
- 80-85 percent less inventory loss
- 90 percent order accuracy improvement
- Same-day shipping from receiving dock
- Elimination of paper documentation

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“At that point, the issue was to have a system that worked and to get it operational as quickly as possible,” he says. “The AccellosOne WMS answered both of those requirements and it proved to be the right decision.”

A scalable and flexible real-time warehouse management software system, AccellosOne WMS streamlines operations and inventory management through the use of automated paper-free processes and radio frequency (RF) communications. With these technologies, it tracks stock into, out of, and within warehouses, streamlining and verifying processes with each movement.

For inbound product, it facilitates receiving up to full containers and coordinates the breakdown and putaway activities. For picking and shipping, it facilitates order receipt and fulfillment through paper pick tickets or wireless RF terminals, customer compliant label generation, and real-time integration back to the ERP software.

We now have an end-to-end integrated, electronic process. While some of our employees still like to see paper documentation, it is no longer actually necessary and many now simply enter orders on the fly.

- LeBlanc

For shipping, Atlantic selected the AccellosOneShip program, which integrates seamlessly with AccellosOne WMS to generate live rates in real time, produce bills of lading, and produce APIs for certain carriers. A unique modification to the software establishes rules to reconcile the disparity between the often high physical volumes of the cases of empty tins with their low weight-to-volume ratio, dramatically simplifying the rating process.

Implementation

LeBlanc’s technology objectives have always been straightforward: contain costs; gain more precise control over inventory, including where/how it was stored within the facility; expedite processes; minimize the possibility of human error; and provide better customer service.

“The ability to find products was paramount because mistakes cost money,” he says.

"If we send the wrong product or the wrong quantity, it impacts the customers operations, which often are precisely timed to our delivery of their containers. Delivery of our tins has to coordinate with production runs or the quality of our customers' products could be impacted."

Implementation of the Accellos software was assigned to an Accellos partner Implementation Specialist. Following a walk-through of Atlantic's operations, the implementation specialist made a number of recommendations for increasing efficiency and productivity, among them more effective use of barcoding; streamlined processes for allocation and picking; and reduction of paper work -- virtually all of which were accepted.

Among others: data maps for various warehouse activities and processes for movement of merchandise within the warehouse -- to the silk screen printing operations and back to inventory, for example. All could be implemented easily within the AccellosOne WMS.

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The warehouse geography had previously been defined in an aisle-bin-row layout. Now, with the physical layout replicated virtually in the AccellosOne WMS, Atlantic for the first time was able to pinpoint precisely the location of every item in its inventory, speeding and simplifying both inbound and outbound processes.

Putaway of inbound stock was accelerated, for example, through the activation of a function key that reveals open bin locations. When the product is placed in its physical bin, its location is automatically recorded

in the AccellosOne WMS, which maintains real time data on product on hand, immediately uploading the information to the ERP system.

Workflow

Atlantic maintains stocking levels based on its long-term experience with its customers' requirements, but it the company's relationships with its own vendors allow it to fulfill emergency requirements as well. Most of the product it receives is already printed -- Santa Claus popcorn cans for Christmas, etc.

Much of the product arrives as full trailer loads. Most of it already barcoded, but the AccellosOne WMS can generate barcode labels if necessary. The product is offloaded to the receiving area where a receipt is generated against the purchase order, with labels printed for all of the boxes in the order. The labels are checked against the shipment's packing slip to assure that the numbers match. Once the accuracy of the shipment is confirmed, the confirmation is uploaded to the ERP system. The merchandise is then formally checked in and put away via the AccellosOne WMS.

Customer service personnel input customer orders to the ERP system, which automatically downloads them to the AccellosOne WMS for processing and allocation. Shippable orders are waved immediately. Depending on ship dates, the orders are allocated and staged, with AccellosOne WMS providing a one-step view of all of the orders in the system.

When AccellosOne WMS generates the picking sheet, it is also displayed on a dispatch screen. "This view assures that we don't oversell," LeBlanc says. "It provides us with great flexibility in drawing down inventory, maintaining service levels and generally managing the warehouse effectively."

LeBlanc has evolved a unique process fulfilling orders that he calls "best-way" shipping.

"In picking, we apply user names to define whether a shipment goes out via truck or parcel service," he says. "Truck shipments get precedence. We wave our LTL orders first, usually in the morning, for picking and staging. Once the trucks are serviced we proceed with the parcel deliveries."

AccellosOne Ship system was built using the latest in Microsoft .NET and Silverlight technology, designed for scalability, and tuned for maximum performance in high volume applications. AccellosOne Ship has allowed Atlantic Can to maximize cost savings by leveraging carrier selection with the multi-carrier rating engine. The system has helped to reduce

shipping costs, improve shipment reliability, track every shipment, and maintain valuable key performance metrics. AccellosOne Ship has enabled improvement of customer service while driving out operational costs.

At the heart of any multi-carrier shipping system is the rating server which is designed for high volume, reliable shipping and comprehensive carrier compliance – with the flexibility to scale from a single workstation to an enterprise level solution with multiple servers, load balancing and high availability to meet even the most advanced requirements.

AccellosOne Ship is also has extensive carrier compliance and is certified by all the major parcel carriers. It has passed the USPS MAC certification and is a registered Confirmation Services and Express Mail Manifesting Vendor.

“We now have an end-to-end integrated, electronic process,” LeBlanc says. “While some of our employees still like to see paper documentation, it is no longer actually necessary and many now simply enter orders on the fly.”

Results

Everything is done in real-time, now, LeBlanc says, noting that prior to the implementation of the Accellos software it was extremely difficult to receive merchandise and ship it the same day. Now, he says, they can ship right from the receiving area.

“Once product is put into the records via the barcode readers, it becomes available for filling orders. Before, we had to manually sort and prioritize the product as it came in the door. We spend far less time on receiving and

putaway because we’ve been able to streamline so many of our processes. Order turnaround related to arriving trailers used to be a two- to three-day process; now we can fulfill and ship those orders within 24 hours.”

The results are dramatic, LeBlanc says. Production on a given day formerly ranged from 50-70 orders per day. Currently, Atlantic ships 100-120 orders per day, with some 25 percent fewer people executing the processes.

The ability to track inventory precisely has cut inventory loss by 80-85 percent, he says. Order accuracy has improved by more than 90 percent as barcode technology, for example, has reduced the opportunity for human error mistakes.

Perhaps most importantly, LeBlanc says, the AccellosOne WMS and AccellosOne Ship has brought Atlantic Can Co. that ability to grow the business by getting more orders out the door, more precise management information and better cost control over the inventory which, after all, is what the company is all about.

“Inventory is money,” he says. “We’ve actually been pushing our suppliers to consider more advanced inventory control processes. As we have been able to rectify the shortcomings in our inventory control processes through the power of AccellosOne WMS, we’ve become more sensitive to their inaccuracies.”

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