

PULSE. ENHANCED CUSTOMER SERVICE



Enhanced Customer Service - Performance Guaranteeing an Encore

Most successful businesses would justifiably claim that customer service has long commanded a significant proportion of their corporate effort. And they would equally accept that 'getting the right goods, to the right place, at the right time' has always been a very major aspect of what effective service is all about.

However, many organisations have now substantially redefined the levels of service they seek to deliver. So what was considered to be 'right' is now regarded as being inadequate. The whole subject is being assigned much higher corporate priorities, while for some firms vastly improving the service given to their customers is regarded as the prime strategy via which to address and attack their market and competition.

Such thinking has placed much greater demands and responsibility on the logistics function in general, and on warehouse operations in particular. This in turn has seen the need for these activities to look to automation and information technology to provide the tools appropriate to the task - key tools such as Warehouse Management Systems (WMS).

How WMS Enhances Customer Service

To put the customer service potential of WMS into context, it is instructive to examine the areas where over and over again - or so it seems - the whole sales/delivery/service process is held hostage by problems within the warehouse.

Let us take on some of these more common problems one by one in turn noting how **PULSE.WMS** has simply and effectively resolved them in real life user applications.

Error Reduction

Detailed analysis across a wide range of industries confirms that typical warehouse error rates are between 3 and 5 percent. Mistakes that are costly and time consuming, and which translate into a similar percentage of customers' orders that are regularly shipped incorrectly.

Some human error is of course unavoidable. However when these sorts of rates are regularly reported, it is clear that much of the blame must be placed on systems that are in operation.

With **PULSE.WMS**, user experience shows that it is possible to consistently enjoy 99.9 percent or better accuracy. This is achieved by integrating into the system a range of modern tools and proven procedures - facilities such as individual item tracking; barcoding for easy product and location identification and for easy checking and monitoring; and real-time processing and updating using data transmission via radio (RF) terminals.

These facilities, when effectively combined, make 0.1 percent or less error rates a demonstrable reality.

The details of how this is attained in practice are presented in the companion **PULSE.WMS** fact sheet "Error Reduction". This demonstrates how errors can be avoided throughout the entire warehouse process, from receipt and putaway through replenishment and picking, to final assembly and despatch. This immediately amounts to greatly enhanced customer service levels and customer satisfaction as the right goods will now be delivered all of the time not just some of the time.

Removing Inefficiencies

From the moment product first arrives at the warehouse to the time it departs, a series of major inefficiencies can play havoc with order fill rates. Consider:

- New stock arrives at goods inwards but under conventional operations it will sit there for some time before central systems are advised of its receipt. In other words, the stock is available but remains 'invisible' to sales order personnel. This will result in orders having to be delayed or even declined
- Once receiving procedures are finally complete, stock will be assigned to its immediate point of holding. There will also be a number of subsequent moves, most typically those replenishing the pick face. And in each instance priorities have to be established and set, instructions have to be issued to staff, and all the while nothing is updated until the ever-present paperwork is completed and returned. As well as stock that inevitably finishes up where it should not be, at any point in time there are also going to be quantities of product whose whereabouts are not precisely known. And this might well be the very inventory that is needed to fill an urgent customer order or that from a particularly important client.
- Even in effective traditional operations the left hand is often a little uncertain about what the right hand is doing. For example, a large batch of current orders will likely initiate a series of picking instructions at the same time as calling for appropriate pick face replenishment. Schedule this work incorrectly and you are either trying to pick stock from empty locations, or you are attempting to replenish pick faces that are still full. Aside from the obvious productivity losses, they also give rise to further delays before orders can be shipped.

In each of these and many like instances, **PULSE.WMS** removes all the problems and the compromises to customer service that result.

Its contribution begins with the receiving process, where all goods inwards are immediately and automatically checked and booked in against purchase order data, EDI/Web transmitted information, or internal factory release documentation. Along with the instantaneous recording of any discrepancies, all valid stock is at once assigned to its determined next port of call within the warehouse. So as soon

as stock arrives, it is 'in the system' and order staff are able to sell it.

Subsequently, and each time stock is moved, operators scan to confirm that the correct item is being handled. Similarly, all locations are scanned to guarantee that these too are correct. This removes errors, eliminates putaway paperwork, and immediately updates all systems via RF terminals once each specific task is complete. Everyone then knows where every item is now, rather than where it was supposed to be some time ago. There is no 'lost' stock. And again picking takes place far faster and far more accurately.

Additionally, and throughout the entire warehouse process, **PULSE.WMS** provides automatic work scheduling and allocation based on a set of 'rules' that have been specified by the user. For all routine work this ensures everything is being done in the most effective and efficient manner. It permits order filling to begin much sooner. And it then reduces to an absolute minimum the overall time needed for all operations to be completed. It also frees up managerial and supervisory time to instead concentrate on handling exceptions, and to give special care to key order and customer situations.

Greater Flexibility

With more demanding customers and ever increasing competitive pressure, organisations need far greater sales and marketing flexibility than ever before. But the benefits of achieving this 'in the front line' are severely hamstrung in those all too frequent situations where warehousing is unable to adequately respond. Thus:

- Customers demand, or sales staff suggest, changes in the way products are sold. This could, for example, see split cases, multiples, variable weight, or distinctly new packing alternatives being added to the usual full case options. It might call for enhanced batch or lot number control. It could see greater use-by date management. Indeed it could entail any number of things that call for the types of changes in procedures that the average warehouse will claim are too hard to achieve – at least within the short term. And, of course, the types of changes which will very rarely gain much assistance from the installation of expensive new materials handling equipment.
- Likewise with the introduction of new products. Here proposed lines may vary from present stock to such an extent (size, weight, stacking characteristics) that they would need to be handled by the warehouse in a totally different way. Existing systems may again be unable to offer the flexibility to meet the variety of new requirements – without costly rethinking and substantial implementation delays.

While such flexibility may well be a dilemma for current operations, it is precisely what **PULSE.WMS** has been designed to manage.

Each **PULSE.WMS** is specifically tailored, via flexible parameter settings, to meet the unique requirements that will obviously apply to its individual user. Therefore when a particular site goes live, its version of **PULSE.WMS** will draw on those features and requirements that are specific to it. Whenever different or additional facilities are called for, these can simply be 'switched on' as and when necessary.

In exactly the same sense, **PULSE.WMS** enables users to define the physical characteristics of their warehouse stock in any manner that is appropriate – such as those size, weight and stacking features just noted. So new options can be immediately catered for with absolutely no disruption.

Ease with Peak Volumes

Many warehouses can reasonably 'get by' under normal pressure. Which is fine so far as it goes, but is of little joy whenever abnormal conditions prevail. It is also a fact of life that what is non-average has a peculiar habit of occurring more and more frequently.

Circumstances vary, but specific days of the week, month ends, seasonal factors and holiday periods are among the times when particular organisations can be faced with larger than normal order books. There are also those instances when high customer volumes result from a company's own initiatives. New product launches; successful sales campaigns; new name clients that have been won – and so on. All of these are situations where conventional operations are going to find it hardest to cope and as such are likely to generate acute customer problems.

An integral facet of **PULSE.WMS** is its capacity to manage warehouse resources and priorities that may vary substantially from day to day. As noted before, the system carries out this powerful role based on a comprehensive set of rules specified by the user.

With such a database of information in place, automatic work allocation can then be achieved as readily for peak volumes as for more normal levels of activity. Via this process **PULSE.WMS** also proactively schedules all the equipment and people tasks that are needed to get the job done in the quickest, most effective manner. And with user experience clearly demonstrating that productivity increases of 30 percent will readily flow, the problems of handling peak loads become a thing of the past. Customer service is maintained even in the most trying of circumstances.

Shipping and Delivery

So far we have addressed the right goods and right time challenges of logistics. But what of the 'right place' requirements? What can be done by the warehouse to enhance shipping and delivery procedures?

Again these are major considerations that have been fully reviewed in the development of **PULSE.WMS**, and which are catered for in its portfolio of capabilities. Automatic checking and cross-referencing are continual WMS processes that span the entire warehouse operation. Thus total accuracy of all product movement continues through final assembly and packaging right up to the time goods are actually despatched.

But even in that final activity the system continues to make an important contribution. **PULSE.WMS** will, for example, provide all relevant despatch and delivery documentation as an automatic by-product of its other work. Of its own accord it can generate loading and despatch information to assist with load and transport planning and to provide basic route details and drop sequences for deliveries. Or if more advanced load/route scrutiny is demanded, it can be used to automatically pass data across to other appropriate optimisation tools.

PULSE.WMS
EFFICIENCY. ACCURACY. PRODUCTIVITY.

