



Lawn and Garden Distributor Finds WMS Fit for Small Business



VG Supply Company is a wholesale distributor of lawn, garden and nursery supplies, headquartered in Park Ridge, IL. Every year, VG Supply distributes thousands of pallets of fertilizer, insecticide, and other garden and landscaping products, with the bulk of their business occurring between January and June. In addition to serving large suppliers like Ortho, Scott's, and Johnson Wax, VG fills a large number of customer orders for non-stock product from their annual lawn and garden show.

Due to the seasonal nature of the business, VG employs many part time and temporary employees, and this created certain order fulfillment problems. They suffered from a heavy volume of returns due to picking errors, and experienced low productivity because pickers had trouble locating non-stock items needed to fill show orders.

Order picking errors were made worse because much of VG's inventory is available in a variety of packaging configurations, so the same UPC could be packaged as a carton, case, display, and single unit. Pickers were routinely filling orders with both incorrect quantities and incorrect product, causing VG to lose customer trust, as well as money.

With their business expanding into multiple warehouses, and order integrity a critical issue, VG engaged Purple Oak to automate their warehouse operations. "Our reputation with our customers was at risk because we were continually shipping the wrong product or misinforming our customers regarding product availability," said Ken Kotas, Vice President of VG Supply.



VG's primary warehouse automation goal was to direct warehouse personnel through the process of receiving, put-away, and picking so that inventory would make it from the loading dock, to the correct stock location, to the correct customer, speeding the order picking process and minimizing customer returns. Pickers needed to be directed to both the correct product and the correct packaging type, and the picking function needed to calculate quantities based on the packaging type. In addition, warehouse personnel needed to be able to cancel or revise shipments at the last minute and return picked items to their proper warehouse location if a customer canceled an order.

VG also wanted to keep their existing custom order processing software because employees were familiar with the system and it met many of their needs. They wanted the new warehouse system to talk directly to the existing system, enabling them to transfer orders to and from the system, and get more information via new reports.



Purple Oak's FELIX wireless warehouse management system gave VG Supply the automation needed for their facility without the complexity and expense of other warehouse systems. FELIX uses Dolphin hand held computers from HHP to manage receiving, shipping, transfer, and physical count operations, as well as directed picking and put-away functions. In addition, FELIX's Sweeper module links the warehouse functions with VG Supply's existing order processing system, making the two systems seamless, and minimizing the impact on their existing operations.

"We're one of the smaller distributors in our industry," said Kotas. "In addition, our business doesn't fit the average mold. We needed a system that was both affordable and flexible enough to meet our requirements. Purple Oak tailored FELIX to meet our exact specifications, without the exorbitant price of other products we looked at. With FELIX, we have drastically reduced customer returns and improved the time it takes to fill orders. We couldn't be happier with the system. The benefits have been enormous and we've reduced returns due to picking errors by over 80%."

Purple Oak, Inc. designs bar code and RF solutions for data collection problems in manufacturing, warehousing and distribution, and corporate business operations nationwide. Purple Oak customers range from Fortune 500 companies to small businesses desiring to improve the efficiency and accuracy of their data collection operations in all applications. Founded in 1996, Purple Oak is a privately held company headquartered in Morton Grove, IL. For more information, contact Purple Oak at 847-699-9630 or visit www.purpleoak.com.