GEM Products' Efficiency Hinges on RF-SMART Automation

"There's a noticeable increase in efficiency. We have been able to process roughly 30% more product through our warehouse with the same amount of people." - Rob Blackerby, Director of IT

GEM PRODUCTS, INC.
Demand The Best!

Pick Planner has led to productivity gains by routing pickers most efficiently

RF-SMART Automation integrates their VLM for picking efficiency

Established in 1961, GEM Products Inc. provides the marine industry with stainless steel hinges, latches, steering wheels, cleats, and many more premium marine-grade products. With its current owners since 1980, GEM Products Inc. has pushed itself to exceed requirements for the highest quality and most innovative marine hardware in the world. In 1998, the scientist on staff created the GEMLUX® Process, which led to products having a beautiful luster, high resistance to corrosion and guarantee the lifetime of the product if it is correctly maintained.

There are many other innovative patents that GEM Products Inc. has created over the past 4 decades for the marine industry, and the business has seen consistent growth and product expansion since 2009. So much so that they outgrew their encumberment system, which became a burden to maintain and update. Additionally, the warehouse was not utilizing bins properly and relied heavily on the knowledge of the warehouse staff to know where inventory was located and what was on-hand. This manual process brought about errors and mistakes that took time to follow-up and correct.

GEM Products Inc. moved into a new larger facility in 2018. Along with a modern facility, they wanted to invigorate their warehouse processes and decided it was time for warehouse management technology to help accomplish their goals.

ROCKING THE BOAT WITH NEW TECHNOLOGY

"We had not been using any kind of Warehouse Management System (WMS) prior to the new facility," said Rob Blackerby, GEM's Director of Information Technology. "In our old facility, we did have bins set-up, but we weren't tracking them to know

precisely how much product we had on-hand or how often we were replenishing bins."

Wanting to replace their burdensome in-house picking/packing system when they moved to a new warehouse, GEM reviewed 3 NetSuite WMS solutions including RF-SMART.

The team knew the importance of having accurate real-time inventory in NetSuite, which was one of the main reasons they selected RF-SMART's Native solution. "RF-SMART gave us the functionality we needed, including wave picking and batch picking. We chose RF-SMART because it was feature-complete for our needs," said Rob.

GEM went live with RF-SMART on the day the new warehouse opened its doors. "The RF-SMART team spent a lot of time with us, ensuring that our questions were answered," said Rob. "Everyone has gone above and beyond their duty." Because they were implementing so many new changes, Rob and his team heavily relied on RF-SMART and quickly grew to appreciate the user-friendly interface. "RF-SMART is easy to use. Everything is one step at a time - it is consistent and very easy to learn," Rob said. "RF-SMART runs, and I don't worry about it."

GEM initially began using functionality including putaway replenishment, preferred bins, assembly work for light manufacturing, sales order picking, shipping and receiving. But as they began to see 30-40% increase in efficiency as they were turning over more inventory, Rob decided to explore how he could further improve.

SHIPSHAPE FUNCTIONALITY FOR SMOOTH SAILING

As GEM started using more RF-SMART functionality, they found that Pick Planner was able to route pickers even more efficiently and fully eliminate paper processes as it offers more complex functionality. "Before implementing Pick Planner, our pickers would get a stack of tickets and decide how to pick," Rob said. "Pick Planner now effectively does that for us. RF-SMART creates a pick ticket associated with the order based on picking strategies to expedite the process. If we have a large order to go on pallet, the system is smart enough to know, and it's the only order to go on the picking task. It will also group many orders to be picked in one pass."

Since implementing RF-SMART, GEM has made many operational gains within their warehouse:

- Preferred bins have improved picking efficiency
- Pick times reduced from 3 minutes to 1 minute
- Picking errors have decreased
- Increased line items shipped by 23%
- Increased packages shipped by 18%

RF-SMART Cycle Counting is also contributing to operational gains. Prior to implementing RF-SMART, annual physical inventories resulted in the total shut-down of all operations with all staff required in the warehouse to complete the inventory. "RF-SMART cycle counts avoid all the trouble of a physical inventory and help me catch inventory discrepancies," said Rob. What's more, Rob has been able to customize cycle counts to best suit GEM's needs to count subsections of racks on specified days.

"The most beneficial thing about RF-SMART is that it runs inside of NetSuite. RF-SMART is so tightly integrated to NetSuite," said

Rob. This is critical for GEM as they have a lot of customizations in NetSuite and are adding customizations around RF-SMART records. For instance, they have a customization that prompts RF-SMART to print out an inventory label after an employee completes a build as part of light manufacturing. "This has been a huge boost to efficiency. Without this customization and the integration to NetSuite, this process would take twice as long," said Rob.

LATCHED ON TO AUTOMATION

In addition to RF-SMART, GEM is using other innovative warehouse automation across their operations. They invested in a vertical lift machine (or automated storage retrieving system) to increase storage density. Partnering with RF-SMART, GEM was able to integrate this system to NetSuite, resulting in expedited picking with full inventory oversight. "It was a very manual process prior to integrating via RF-SMART's Automation module," said Rob. The picks from the VLM are updated in real-time in NetSuite via RF-SMART's Automation Module.

Combining the vertical lift machine with RF-SMART Pick Planner has further increased efficiency. Prior to this, Rob's staff would wait in line to use the vertical lift machine. "We now have pick plans set up in Pick Planner specifically for the VLM," Rob said. Pick Planner splits orders across multiple tasks, sending one user to pick from the racks and one user to pick from the VLM. Now, GEM can capitalize on all available efficiencies.

"One of the things that we realized is that investing into technologies (whether that be software, equipment or best practices) it really helps us to get more done with the same amount of people," Rob said.

CHARTING A COURSE FOR EXPANSION WITH RF-SMART

The biggest benefit RF-SMART has brought to GEM is the visibility and management of their inventory. As RF-SMART keeps users completing tasks correctly, Rob has complete confidence in their inventory. Due to this, Rob is excited about the future with RF-SMART. "As we grow, there is functionality for all of our needs," Rob said. "I'm always looking for new RF-SMART functions. The more I use it, the more efficient we become."