Tranforming the Supply Chain with Voice-enabled Stock Picking

Profile: Supply chain specialists offering bespoke logistics solutions to customers in the UK and continental Europe

Location: East Midlands, United Kingdom

Industry: Logistics

Website: gistworld.com

Solutions:
- Ivanti® Speakeasy
- Ivanti® Avalanche

Benefits:
- With hands free and no need to type, warehouse stock pickers can work with greater speed and accuracy to meet clients' service level agreements sSooner and with fewer resources
- Offers an easy, low-risk way to optimize clients' supply chains, a key competitive differentiator that helps Gist retain existing clients and attract new ones
- Provides a rapid return on investment, as the flexibility, ease of deployment and user adoption provide increased fast time-to-value

Overview

Employing more than 5,000 employees, Gist is a 24/7 supply chain company that offers innovative solutions around contract logistics, global freight management and temperature controlled distribution. Gist serves a range of customers from the commercial and industrial sectors, and specializes in managing supply chains for perishable and chilled products. One of the company's best-known clients is Starbucks, for which it manages logistics operations for dairy, ambient non-food, fresh chilled and pastry products delivered to approximately 800 stores in the UK and Ireland.

Spotting Opportunities for Optimization

A key part of Gist's business is warehouse stock picking, which must be carried out quickly and accurately to ensure that the right products get to its customers on time. Stock pickers receive instructions on the products they need to select and where they are located, pick the items off the shelf for delivery and confirm the picks.

Martin Withers Warehouse Manager at Gist, explains: "We are always looking for ways to pick stock faster, which is hard to do when you are holding a device in one hand. For a customer like Starbucks with small quantities of multiple items for multiple destinations daily, you really want both hands free for maximum speed. And for pickers in cold storage and wearing gloves, it was especially awkward keying numbers into a device."

Recognizing that voice-enabled picking could introduce new levels of efficiency, Gist tried a solution but soon found that it was unable to keep up with the speed at which its pickers work. The company began looking for a more powerful alternative. As staff turnover among stock

pickers is typically high, ease of use and low training requirements were crucial for the new solution.

Pain-free Path to Greater Efficiency

Gist chose to deploy Ivanti Speakeasy, a full-featured voice-enablement solution that does not require major changes to infrastructure. The solution enables pickers to work without interruption, by simply saying 'next' to confirm their picks and then receiving voice instructions for the next item.

Marcus Jeffery, Business IM Manager Major Accounts at Gist, remarks: "One of our IT suppliers, M-Netics, proposed Ivanti Speakeasy to us and we immediately saw that it was a much better fit for us than the previous tool. A big selling point was that there was no requirement to buy and run a costly voice server, we just needed the devices themselves.

"Another plus was the low cost and risk of implementation: Ivanti Speakeasy just sits on top of the telnet client that is installed on all of our devices to connect to our WMS [warehouse management system], so we did not need to change anything."

Rapid ROI

The implementation lived up to expectations – within three days, Gist had two Speakeasy devices up and running within its live environment, growing to 12 devices over a six-week testing period. Gist conducted a cost-benefit analysis that revealed the solution, as implemented in Gist's environment, would pay for itself extremely rapidly.

Marcus Jeffery comments: "Our general manager, operational and IT leads could all see the benefits right from the initial demonstration – it was obvious that Ivanti Speakeasy was going to be an easy and low-risk implementation with a big pay-off.

New Levels of Flexibility

To ensure the smooth roll-out of Ivanti Speakeasy, Gist also chose to deploy Ivanti Avalanche, enabling easy software distribution, sending configuration updates and full management of all its mobile devices.

Marcus Jeffery adds: "With Ivanti Avalanche, we have the flexibility our business needs. If we want to make a change to accommodate a customer's processes or try out

new ways of working, we can simply use Avalanche to push it out to a couple of test devices with no changes required to the WMS itself. For a business like ours, which always tailors operations to suit our customers' specific needs, the adaptability of Ivanti solutions is fantastic."

Benefits in Action

Gist is using Ivanti Speakeasy to accelerate picking for Starbucks, meeting service level agreements faster and with fewer resources than before.

Martin Withers says: "Switching to voice-enabled picking has made a massive difference to users. The old devices were slow and hard to use, and you had to put them down if you needed both hands to pick an item. As a result, it was quite easy to mislay your device. Now, we have cut the number of mislaid devices and removed a lot of tedious keying and re-keying, so we can pick with greater speed, efficiency and accuracy."

The solution has proved easy for employees to start using. Unlike the previous voice software, the company does not have to spend time training the system to recognize each new picker's voice.

Martin Withers elaborates: "For most people, Ivanti Speakeasy understands them right out of the box. New pickers just spend a couple of minutes training in the warehouse so that the system learns to filter out loud background noise."

Based on the benefits Gist has seen using voice solutions for its Starbucks account, the company is actively looking to deploy it for other customers. Marcus Jeffery concludes: "With Ivanti Speakeasy, we have an easy, low-risk, agile way to offer better supply-chain services. This is a great example of how Gist uses the latest technology to improve logistics for our customers."

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