# Bowker slashes paperwork with Spirit's help

**spirit**
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When an organisation wants to streamline some of its warehousing operations, new software and hardware often go hand-in-hand. That's why leading transport and warehouse distributor Bowker needed help from a specialist, independent consultancy when it decided to develop a more effective, more accurate and less paper-intensive approach to its warehouse activities. Spirit Data Capture Limited provided a new warehouse application along with a SUMO ST395 tablet, a Honeywell SR61 scanner and a Datamax printer. These have helped the Group to meet all of its streamlining objectives.

The Bowker Group was established in 1919 and has developed into a major UK and international transport service provider, operating over 120 vehicles and 350 trailers. The company's success has been reflected in the various accreditations and industry awards it has received – it was recently voted as one of the 'Top 20 Great British Transport Companies of all Time'.

Bowker also has 40,000m² of modern warehousing facilities at Preston and Hull, with each operation being fully equipped with the latest racking and handling equipment. This is handled by the company's highly trained staff, supported by a sophisticated Warehouse Management System, which provides customers with a direct interface into the system.

## A growing problem

The growth of the warehouse operations and the complexity of the picking requirements involved mean that a high level of accuracy is needed for any data capture and analysis. Until recently, the Group was using a paper-based system, creating items such as Goods Receipt Notes and Picking Notes from its back-end system. These documents would then be collected from the office, completed and returned to the office. The information then had to be fed manually into the back-end systems.

"A lot of time was wasted in moving paperwork to and from the office," says Chris Kay, Group IT Manager. "Other issues also arose – such as the legibility of the completed document; paperwork that wasn't always returned on time; a lack of traceability of the status of a goods receipt or an order pick; and duplication of work. We wanted to create a more effective warehouse application that would remove manual processing and reduce human error.

"We therefore decided to start looking for new software and hardware. We needed handheld devices that would be rugged and reliable and that could handle the large amount of data and processing required. On the software side, we needed something that would be adaptable. As a third party warehouse provider, we need to tailor our systems around our customers' requirements. It also needed to be simple to use but complex enough to handle the various possibilities, and able to integrate with our back-end systems."

## A versatile solution

He continues: "We identified Spirit Data Capture as a potential solution provider and in discussions, Spirit helped us to break down and map out the various processes that were being performed within the warehouse. They also used their expertise to give us valuable advice about the capabilities of some suitable hardware solutions.

"After accepting their recommendations, this led to the design and testing phase, followed by the installation of the software and the design of a barcode label that would work effectively with the scanners."

Spirit developed a software solution that covered the company's warehouse activities from start to finish – including barcoding, auditing, stock control, and health and safety – using different devices for different parts of the application. Spirit also installed WiFi in the Group's Head Office and in the depots.

The new app allows Bowker to record goods into the depot and movement around the site, as well as pick-checking etc. This app was developed in two phases:

**1) A number of work flows.** The first was goods receipts; then the picking template (picking items from an order); followed by pick-checking on an ad hoc basis; and finally warehouse actions (which allows the company to relocate items, check pallet locations and re-barcoding etc). The app can also be used to carry out ad hoc stock checks all the way through to a complete warehouse stock take.

**2) Cross Dock In.** This is a method of receiving goods from delivery vehicles and locating them within the depot. It was complemented by **Cross Dock Out** – which tracks the loading of goods to delivery vehicles.

For hardware, Spirit recommended the Sumo ST395 tablet, the Honeywell SR61 long-range scanner, and a Datamax printer. The ST395 is a lightweight Windows-based tablet that features a 9" integrated touchscreen and high performance processing. The Honeywell SR61 is a tethered and rugged barcode scanner that is excellent at decoding even poor quality and damaged barcodes.

The new software application is now being used in the warehouses: all inbound stock is confirmed, barcoded and located via the app, as are all pallet relocations. All outbound stock is also located, picked and checked via the app and stock checks can also be carried out. The software provides two-way messaging with the warehouse operative.

Meanwhile, the cross-docking facility is used for scanning all pallets coming into the depot for onward delivery and for scanning pallets to either the delivery vehicle or the trailer. This gives Bowker full traceability of every pallet that has come into its depot and enables the company to trace the pallet all the way through to delivery (and to provide this data to its customers).

## Great results

Spirit's solution has led to a dramatic reduction in paperwork; fewer manual errors (due to automation of some activities); and less time needed to complete jobs. Along with real time updates, it has resulted in faster invoicing and improved response and performance times for the Group. Chris Kay continues: "This new approach has streamlined our operations and has increased the accuracy of the information collected. It also makes stock information visible to all of those who need to see it."

He adds: "We have a good working relationship with Spirit and believe that we have both learnt a lot during the development of the application. Initially, we were very reliant on Spirit and the service we received was professional at all times. Indeed, some of their staff have gone beyond the call of duty to ensure that all of our requirements have been met and that the application met our expectations. I would have no hesitation in using them or recommending them to others."

**Honeywell**

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