

COMPANY: BIRITE FOODSERVICE DISTRIBUTORS
INDUSTRY: FOOD SERVICE DISTRIBUTION

VOICE-POWERED RESULTS:

OBJECTIVE

Improve order accuracy, increase productivity and throughput, reduce employee training time, and reduce operating costs, thereby generating higher customer satisfaction, increased loyalty, and higher profitability.

RESULTS

- /// **Order accuracy improved by over 90% following implementation.**
- /// **Mis-picks dropped to nearly zero.**
- /// **Training time dropped from two weeks to a matter of hours.**



Voice-Directed Distribution™ Makes BiRite Foodservice Distributors 'Top Pick' By Customers

BiRite Foodservice Distributors is considered the largest independent broadline foodservice distributor in northern California, with annual sales that top \$240 million. Located just minutes from San Francisco, the company operates from a 235,000 square-foot state-of-the-art facility. BiRite provides customers with a wide range of product offerings, including: dry groceries; meat; seafood; poultry; dairy; frozen foods; disposables; warewashings and cleaning chemicals; equipment and smallwares. In this competitive business, however, reputation is only as good as the last shipment to the customer's loading dock: a missed case or the wrong product creates big problems.

Recently, when BiRite began investigating warehouse management systems (WMS) to help it deliver higher customer satisfaction and increased operational efficiencies, it turned to BFC Associates, a warehouse management software developer, for recommendations. Once BFC Associates assessed BiRite's needs, it recommended Voice-Directed Distribution from Vocollect.

"I always assumed that the return on investment would take a couple of years, but we are already saving money every time we don't have to make an emergency delivery to a customer. Plus, it enhances our image with our customers. You can't put a dollar value on that, but if I had to, it would be in the millions."

Dennis Collins
General Manager
BiRite Foodservice Distributors

The Challenge Getting it Right the First Time

Imagine that you are the region's leading independent foodservice distributor and your largest customer has just called indicating that its delivery is incorrect. No problem, you can correct it, right? Sure, but what is the impact? In this industry, it's huge, according to BiRite General Manager Dennis Collins.

"We knew we could do better. Even though our mis-pick rate out of some 30,000 to 35,000 cases everyday was low, it had an effect on our customers, and an impact on our productivity. If somebody mis-picked 10 cases of apple pie and sent a customer french fries instead," said Collins, "that's a problem. From a customer-service point of view, it hurt us, but it also hurt us financially. With the cost of fuel and labor, it was expensive to fix. Depending on where the customer was located, it would cost us one person and an entire shift to fix the mistake. We needed to work on preventing the mistakes in the first place."

That's when BiRite turned to BFC Associates, the provider of its warehouse management solution. "When BFC came in," added Collins, "we were doing all of the picking manually; we had no handhelds, no headsets, nothing. Our selectors were just going out with a stack of labels and picking products. When you're picking orders at 2 a.m. under the best of circumstances, it's a challenge for any human being to maintain focus all night long. We knew we had to automate."

When BFC recommended that BiRite evaluate Voice-Directed Distribution from Vocollect, BiRite agreed.

The Solution A 'Call-To-Action' that Keeps Employees Focused

"The hands-free and interactive capability of the Vocollect Talkman® is the key," said Collins, "and to me makes it the best solution. Deploying this kind of technology that helps people stay focused and acts as a kind of double-check is a major step toward reaching our objectives."

"We've seen our order accuracy improve by more than 90%, and our mis-picks have dropped to virtually zero."

Dennis Collins
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BFC Associates president Lyle Castle explained how his firm supported BiRite through the selection and implementation process. "We worked extensively with BiRite to understand their system to be able to fully integrate it with our WMS," he said. "They have coolers and freezers, so the system had to work in a multi-temp environment, all the way down to minus five degrees. Given our experience with Vocollect in other situations, we knew it would perform well. When it came time to roll it out we used a phased approach, implementing Voice-Directed Distribution in two quick steps. We started out with just a few selectors and trained them on the Vocollect Talkman units, then moved on."

Castle explained that BFC based the training on his firm's Truck Builder® module for pallet-mapping. "We basically started with one truck," said Castle, "and we showed employees how to build it and pick it a specific way."

"The entire process," explained Collins, "took about four weeks, and 60 workers are now using the system."

The Results Turning Customers' Heads and Driving Profitability

With the goal of improving order accuracy, increasing productivity and throughput, and reducing employee training time, BiRite had high expectations when it gave the go-ahead to implement voice.

"There was just no question that it had to help us reduce our mis-picks," said Collins, "and we are extremely pleased. At this point, we've seen our order accuracy improve by more than 90%, and our mis-picks have dropped to virtually zero."

Training has also improved dramatically. "New employees come right out of the chute and don't make any mistakes," said Barulich. "The voice technology takes control and directs them to where they have to go. We set up test routes and test orders and have trainers walking behind the employees, listening in on training headsets to gauge their understanding. We have noticed a huge improvement—training has gone from two weeks to a matter of hours."

BiRite officials also expect to see a significant return on investment. "I always assumed that the return on investment would take a couple of years," commented Collins, "but we are already saving money every time we don't have to make an emergency delivery to a customer. Plus, it enhances our image with our customers because we aren't making emergency deliveries—we are not plaguing them with those kinds of mistakes anymore."

Collins told the story of one demanding customer with very high standards. The customer threatened to take its business to a competitor. "Now that we've installed Voice-Directed Distribution, this customer has done a complete 180 and is now complimenting us on the job we're doing. You can't put a dollar value on that, but if I had to, it would be in the millions."



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