

Giant Eagle: How Voice Picking is Helping Giant Eagle Make Every Day Taste Better

For more than 65 years, Giant Eagle has introduced unique merchandising programs, exciting new product offerings and a full range of in-store services to fit changing lifestyles — and a changing world. Such innovations have been a hallmark for the company through three generations, as it has grown into one of the Top 20 super-market businesses in the nation. But in August 2001, Giant Eagle put another kind of innovation to work, beginning at its Butler, PA, distribution center. That innovation: the human voice.

The Challenge:

Beef up Accuracy, Productivity and ROI

Giant Eagle depends upon Butler Refrigerated Meats, an 85,000 square foot facility, to ship fresh meats to all 200 of its stores throughout Western Pennsylvania, Eastern Ohio and Northern West Virginia. With that level of demand, BRM keeps 30-50 selectors working seven days a week, picking tens of thousands of cases of meat and meat products. In a year, workers will handle more than 10 million cases weighing up to 80 pounds each. That's *800 million* pounds of meat in and out the door!

And with every single case, accuracy is crucial: there's no room for shorts and/or mis-picks if BRM is to meet its store calls and Giant Eagle, its commitments to customers. Nor can there be any slouch on productivity if the company is to guarantee low prices every day and still succeed as a business.

"This is a home run for us – not just a single – a home run. Talkman system is making a huge impact on the way we do business."

Larry Baldauf

Senior Vice President
Distribution & Logistics
Giant Eagle



Giant Eagle saw an opportunity for significant savings at BRM by capturing the exact weight of each case, rather than relying on "average" weights. But catch weights had to be quick and easy; having workers stop what they're doing hundreds of times a day to write down case weights was no answer.

For Giant Eagle, the real answer was voice computing, based on its track record for boosting accuracy and productivity, while delivering big on ROI.

Looking ahead, Larry Baldauf, Senior Vice President of Distribution and Logistics, noted: "By adding voice and Talkman® T2 to our operations, we expect payback in less than a year and ongoing savings in distribution costs over the long haul."

Voice Results

Application

- Refrigerated meats - case lots

Installation

- Butler Refrigerated Meats
- 55 Talkman terminals
- OMI International WMS: Lucent 11Mb, 2.4 Ghz RF spread spectrum

Issues

- Accuracy to meet the needs of 200 stores throughout the Giant Eagle network
- Improved productivity and cost savings with catch weights

Early Results

- Reduced mis-picked cases by 88%
- Reduced shorted cases by 79%
- Cut total errors by more than 80%

ROI

- Payback expected in less than one year

Future Improvements

- Use as prototype for additional locations and product lines

"You have excellent people on site. Our folks say Vocollect has provided better support than any other vendor we have used in a long time."

Larry Baldauf

Senior Vice President
Distribution & Logistics
Giant Eagle

The Solution:

Vocollect and Talkman®

To put voice to work, Giant Eagle selected Vocollect, a company that has been dedicated to voice technology since its founding in 1987. Vocollect's Talkman® features an advanced speaker-dependent recognizer and a host of design improvements.

Vocollect already had a proven interface to the facility's WMS: TRICEPS® by OMI International, a real-time system that enables paperless automation via distribution control and labor management features plus fork interleaved RF technology.

Vocollect phased in the installation just over three weeks, creating voice templates and introducing the system to the entire labor pool at the facility, approximately 75 people. Among the features that quickly proved their value: the Talkman system's use of check digits, randomly assigned digits that identify each picking slot. Pickers are required to read these digits to verify that they are at the correct location; only then will it send the pick command. The result: near-perfect accuracy.

Talkman computers also solved the catch weight issue; now workers simply read off the weight that's written on the side of each case. This records the weight *and* reports a completed pick, all in one step. And, because the system was designed for two digits after the decimal point, all weights are now accurate to the hundredth of a pound.

Yet another success: allaying workers' concerns about losing "sight" of the load they're building. The Talkman system sets up each load with a summary description, plus a note: "You have several base picks. Would you like to hear them?" This base-picking option makes it easy, even for inexperienced pickers, to build a solid load.

The Result:

Let's Talk Success

Talkman is hard at work at the BRM facility. In fact, all picking has been done by voice since the end of the third full week of the installation.

Thanks to BlueStreak™, Vocollect's speaker-dependent recognizer, a Talkman computer understands every worker who's on pick duty any given shift.

User acceptance is high, helped along by the fact that a Talkman T2 weighs less than one pound and that wearing it frees hands for the tough job of pulling hefty cases of meat. As expected, the wearable, mobile computer is working well in the 34-degree environment; even freezer-room temperatures wouldn't be a problem.

And, when it comes to accuracy, the numbers speak for themselves:

- Shorted cases down by 79%
- Mis-picked cases down by 88%
- Incidence of cases shorted: 1 in 1,250 — nearly five times better than before
- Incidence of cases mis-picked: less than 1 in 9,000 — nearly seven times better

So impressive — and so quick — were these and other key results at BRM that Giant Eagle accelerated its plans to implement Talkman at its Bedford Heights, Ohio, facility. Three additional distribution centers, not far behind, will continue Giant Eagle's move to voice-directed systems. 🚀



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Vocollect. Voice-Directed Distribution.

Since pioneering voice recognition for industry in 1987, Vocollect has set the standard for warehouses and other business settings. Together, its market-leading Talkman® wearable mobile computer and integrated software suite cut operating costs by eliminating errors and improving worker productivity shift after shift.

Leading WMS providers, material handling integrators and specialty voice solution providers around the world choose the performance and reliability of Vocollect to deliver integrated voice-directed distribution solutions. And every day, over 60,000 workers around the globe rely on Vocollect's integrated voice solution to help improve their operations.