# LogisticsPartners
independent logistics consultancy

# VOICE TECHNOLOGY
## DOES YOUR WAREHOUSE NEED IT?

# Voice Technology – Does Your Warehouse Need it?

Logistics Partners have been involved in Voice technology implementations for Musgrave Retail Partners Ireland & BWG and have reviewed the technology for several other customers. This technology can bring great benefits for many warehouses but it is not suitable for all. Below is a document (created in 2005 and updated this year) to describe the technology and the benefits that can be achieved.

## What is Voice Technology?

The use of the human voice to input data to a computer system instead of the keyboard or RF scanner etc. The technology has been around for 20 years but only in the last few years considered robust enough for use in the supply chain. This is increasingly being used for picking and despatch within Logistics operations.

## Who are the main providers?

There are various providers of voice hardware and middleware in the UK these include:

- VoiteQ, who supply Vocollect Talkman® wearable computers and the VoiceMan software solution. Customers include Sainsburys and Brakes.

- Voxware a specialist voice software provider who originally supplied VoiceLogistics® middleware and now market Voxware VMS (Voice management solutions) which include VoxConnect and VoxStudio. Customers include B&Q and Waitrose.

- Psion who supply Vocollect Talkman® wearable computers and the VoiceClient™ software solution. Customers include 3663 and East of England Co-Operative Society.

- Zetes who sell the 3iV Crystal voice solution that can operate with various voice hardware solutions and can integrate to your WMS using 3iVConnector or via the 3iV Business Plus middleware. Customers include Morrisons and the Co-Operative Group.

- Many WMS software companies provide integrated voice solutions as part of their core product

## What is involved?

The user wears a headset and lightweight belt pack. The user receives instructions via the ear piece and confirms vocally using the microphone. Users need to spend approximately 30 minutes "training" the system with keywords prior to first use. The voice pack communicates, over an RF data network, either directly to the installed Warehouse Management System (WMS) or via a middleware solution. Where the WMS communicates directly with the voice hardware the system can be real-time. If a middleware solution is implemented or the WMS software will communicate with the Voice system in batch and the Voice recognition software allocate tasks etc. and sends information back to the WMS when tasks are completed. Many of the hardware providers or resellers also have their own middleware solutions.

## Who is using it?

In October 2002 Wincanton, on behalf of Somerfield, trialled VoiceLogistics® in Pitreavie, Scotland. The Voice technology worked alongside the existing EXE WMS software and replaced label picking. Wincanton reported a reduction in errors of 60 to 70% and a productivity increase of 20%. The solution was rolled out to the rest of the Somerfield network at the time. Wincanton also reported a

financial saving in not requiring labels.

In 2003 Aberness, the Scottish Wholesaler, was using Talkman® terminals and software implemented by VoiteQ. The system replaced a mainly paper based system. Customer Service levels increased from 94 to 98% and the pick speed from 90 to 140 cases per hour.

The Information above is for some of the early adopters of voice picking, which has now been implemented by many varied companies including Co-Operative Group, Morrisons, Waitrose, Argos, 3663, Nisa Todays, Brakes Harper Collins, B&Q and WH Smiths, with similar results to those above. Harper Collins reported an increase in picking accuracy to 99.98% in 2009 and 3663 reported a 30% productivity increase in order selection in 2008.

## Why implement?

The main benefits of implementing voice are:
- Improved productivity
- Increased accuracy
- Cost savings
- It provides hands-free operation
- Supplier Barcodes are not required
- Short Return on Investment (ROI) time in the right environment

## Is it suitable for you?

- Often the improvements in pick accuracy quoted by suppliers are from voice projects where a site has moved from paper based picking to Voice based picking. If you have already implemented an RF barcode scanning solution then the improvements in accuracy and productivity from voice will be smaller.

- Voice units are more expensive than hand-held RF terminals and do not provide benefits in all environment. If you are running a case picking operation voice will bring greater benefits than to an operation handling mainly pallets.

- One of the benefits of implementing voice technology can be the cost saving of removing labels and paper from the supply chain. But you need to ensure the labels are not required elsewhere in your supply chain.

- Voice is not a solution for poor product layout or poor operational practices within the warehouse.

Before deciding to implement voice a warehouse systems review should be carried out to highlight the areas you should focus on and to investigate if voice can be introduced to existing processes and systems. Find out more at www.logisticpartners.co.uk/systemsreview

## Who are we?

Logistics Partners assists retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and logistics providers to maximise the return on investment in supply chain systems and Logistics technology.

We have a track record of ensuring that supply chain systems are implemented and operated in the most efficient and cost effective manner.

Logistics Partners have real "hands-on" experience of implementing and operating various market leading supply chain systems including Warehouse Management Systems (WMS), Transport Management Systems (TMS), Forecasting & Purchasing, Sales Order Processing (SOP) and ePos.

Logistics Partners can also guide you through the increasing choices of logistics technology including RF, Voice, barcode scanning, telematics, Cloud solutions, SAAS solutions to make sure you get a solution that improves your current operation and gives a real Return on Investment (ROI).

Website: www.logisticpartners.co.uk

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