



MEDIA MENTIONS

Voice Technology: From Revolution to Evolution *Integrated Solutions for Optimized Operations*

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Voice Technology: From revolution to evolution

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https://www.scmr.com/article/voice_technology_from_revolution_to_evolution

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In fact, yesterday's DC workers might not recognize today's voice devices, which have evolved to sophisticated, streamlined Bluetooth scanners, headsets and even smart watches. But the changes don't end there. Rather than stand-alone tech, modern voice technology is part and parcel of optimized solutions.

Take, for example, a U.K.-based **third-party logistics provider (3PL)** operating a multi-channel DC full of portable electronics and accessories. The DC was using an RF-based picking process using ring scanners. While accurate, the screen- and scan-based process added time to each pick. What's more, the warehouse management system-directed pick-to-cart process was travel intensive.

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If that means the customer has a **warehouse management system (WMS)**, then, voice solution providers can now fill in the gaps that the system doesn't have in conjunction with the voice application, serving as a component of an overall optimization package. "Today's voice solutions are integrated into real-time distribution software platforms that manage all pick, pack and ship," says Jen Maloney, Numina Group's marketing director.

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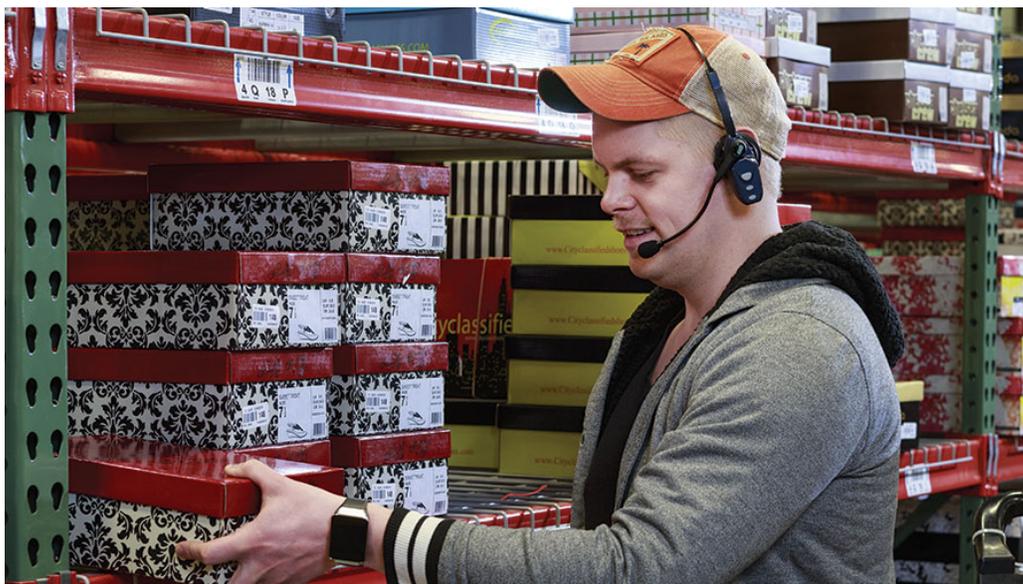
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The case for multi-modal combinations with voice goes beyond the numbers, however.

Keith Phillips, president and CEO of **Voxware** says the multi-modal approach also serves a wide demographic well, offering a "something for everyone" assortment of devices. "You can pair the technology to the individual," he says. "You might have a 21-year-old who is very comfortable working off a smart phone, where a 60-year-old employee might struggle with it."

This drill down also extends to the task, where Phillips says Voxware helps DCs match up the task to the tech. "When we work with a client, we do an in-depth review of their DC processes, the products they handle, the workforce demographics and more," he explains. "A lot comes into play, and we develop a total solution from these inputs."

Underlying it all, are systems like Workforce Connect or **Numina Group's Real-Time Distribution Software**, an execution and control system. These software systems are a big part of what sets modern voice technology apart from their predecessors, which existed more as stand-alone technology.



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Verticals and the pandemic

As is the case in many industries, the pandemic has served to accelerate the evolution of voice technology, as well as the verticals where it has a strong presence. “If you look at where we are now, the two hottest verticals are grocery and retail,” says Phillips. “Depending on the products, some DCs can’t keep them on the shelves. Buying habits have shifted, and this has only made accuracy that much more important.”

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Over the years, the industry has learned that voice has a sweet spot, says Wheeler. “This has a lot to do with the cadence of the operation,” he explains. “Too slow and voice doesn’t bring enough value. Too fast, and you need wearables or other visuals. This is why grocery has always been a good fit.”

The food and beverage sector has also been a strong vertical for voice. As with other segments, this vertical is using voice as part of an overall enterprise solution. One adopter that has combined voice with picking and analytics for greatly improved performance is New Jersey-based **Anacapri Foods**. The company operates out of a 130,000-square-foot DC and sought out a solution that it could easily integrate into its existing infrastructure.

Working with Voxware, the company rolled out the solution during a slow month to ensure that employees could spend extra time learning to trust it. With compensation tied to pieces picked per hour, many pickers were skeptical. In the end, however, the team increased volume by 20%.

In addition to improved productivity rates and real-time analytics, Anacapri has been using voice to train new employees. Phillips says this is an area where voice excels and is particularly applicable in the pandemic. “We can hand a new employee a device and a headset or smart glasses, and they can log on, get user instruction from a screen and be productive in 10 minutes,” he says.

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As providers look ahead, they see an ever-more sophisticated future when it comes to voice. “Voice is commoditized,” says Ritter. “Our core business today is orchestration, and in the future, that will likely include less reliance on humans as securing labor becomes more difficult.”

Phillips agrees. “Companies will continue to see high turnover in the DC,” he says. “We’re focused on helping customers manage a workplace and its labor pool more effectively than in the past. We think those challenges will only increase in the future, so technology and optimization will only become more critical.”

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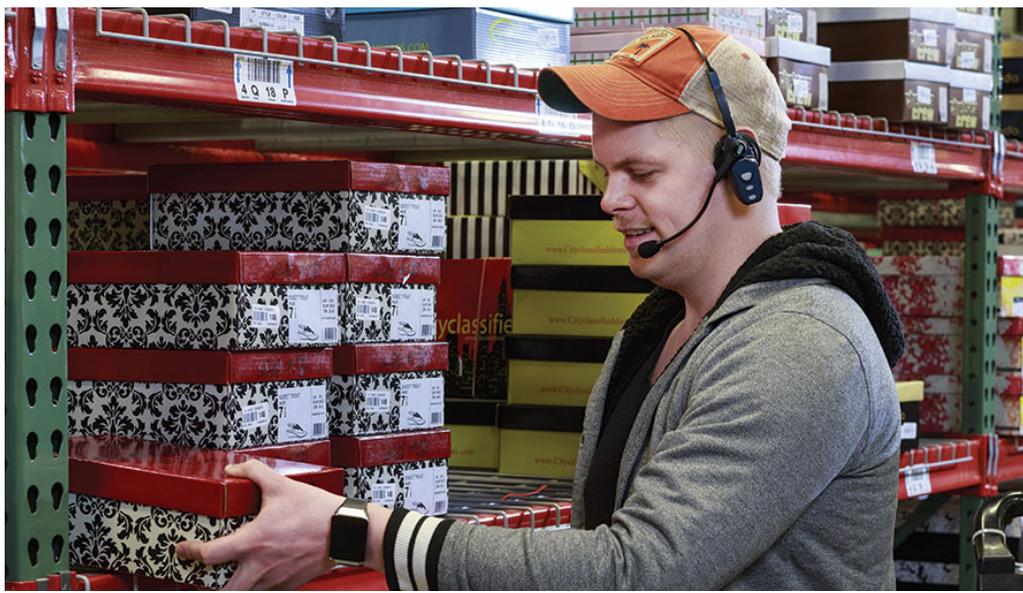
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