



Distribution Center MANAGEMENT

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Managing people, materials and costs in the warehouse or DC

From the Golden Zone

Four tips for rapidly and successfully implementing a warehouse management system

By Chris Goldsmith

Congratulations! You got your business case approved and now you are turning your eye toward actually implementing a warehouse management system. While you probably encountered challenges in getting to this point, the next steps will be even more difficult if you are not adequately prepared. Here are several tips to help ensure your implementation moves along at a rapid pace toward a successful “go-live.”

Staff the right team

This is the most fundamental requirement of implementing a WMS. Failure to have the appropriate and sufficient staffing capacity and resources will put the project in jeopardy from day one. Make sure the project team has diverse skill sets, as the size of the team and roles required will vary based on the overall scope of the project. Some roles could be:

Project sponsor. Just as the project sponsor was critical to getting the project approved, this person will be vital during the implementation itself. He or she will be responsible for: securing and keeping qualified resources on the team for the life of the project, shielding the team from distractions, and defining and communicating the goals of the project to everyone in the company.

Project manager. This person is critical to

ensuring that weekly and daily activities consistently move the team closer to the go-live date by taking the following actions: driving issue resolution, holding project team members (internal and external) accountable for deliverables, and communicating project status.

Operations. As the ultimate end users of the system, this group has several key responsibilities, including: testing the application, training warehouse resources, and completing the physical preparation of the warehouse (racking, labeling, printers, etc.).

IT. This group handles the technical components of the project, including: setting up hardware and software, developing appropriate interfaces, and establishing back-up and recovery procedures.

Rather than cross your fingers and hope for minimal issues, put a procedure in place to quickly detail an action plan to resolve issues.

Train the team

Once you have assembled the team, you might be inclined to kick off the project right away. However, training is an important prerequisite. In many cases, the team will not have experience with the specific application you are implementing. Asking your team to run a project smoothly while trying to learn a new system is a recipe for disaster. It is important that each person completes training tai-

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lored to his/her project responsibilities before you begin implementation.

Create a strong issue resolution process

Rather than cross your fingers and hope for minimal issues, put a procedure in place to quickly detail an action plan to resolve issues. When a problem arises, key areas you need to determine are:

- Who will drive the issue to closure?
- When does it need to be resolved to stay on schedule?
- What do you need to resolve the issue? This helps project managers understand what is needed and how it could impact the project.

While no one likes to bring issues to superiors, it is important to involve senior members when necessary to determine the quickest way to resolve the issue.

Develop a strong change control process

Just like issue resolution, a strong change control process is also a necessary prerequisite for a

successful project. No matter how detailed the RFP or system specification, it is impossible to know everything about a project before starting. A solid change control process helps navigate new requirements by:

- Controlling risk. Assess the risk/reward of making the change.
- Increasing communication/visibility. Help everyone understand and support the change.
- Documenting changes to the statement of work. Keep a system of record so everyone has the same expectations.

Not having this process in place can result in an ever-changing project scope and project delays.

While your WMS implementation will have its challenges, these tips should help you successfully navigate any bumps you encounter along the way. Good luck!

Chris Goldsmith is a strategy manager for High Jump Software. You can reach him at 952-573-5085 or at chris.goldsmith@mmm.com. **DCM**

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712 Main Street — Suite 187B, Boonton, NJ 07005-1450

Telephone: (973) 265-2300 • Fax: (973) 402-6056 • Email: info@DistributionGroup.com • Website: www.DistributionGroup.com

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