

National Distribution Company Goes Mobile With Vision Computer Works

Damco Distribution Services, a warehousing and distribution company in South Gate, Calif., handles hundreds of shipments for customers around the country, so accuracy is crucial. “We deliver cross-docking, warehousing and inland transportation services to shippers from 21 facilities in every major ocean and rail gateway in North America,” says Rolando Zambrana, senior analyst, technical support at Damco. “We can’t afford to make mistakes.”

For most of their business history, the process of receiving shipments, counting boxes, applying labels, and shipping outbound for their clients was manual. “In the good old days we did everything by hand using pencil and paper. Accuracy was always an issue because my fives tend to look like the letter ‘S’ and I’m not the only one,” says Zambrana. “The bill-of-lading process also used to take much longer by hand, not to mention unloading containers and taking inventory. The need to automate all of that was something we knew we had to pursue if we wanted to stay competitive.”

That’s when they turned to Vision Computer Works, (VCW).

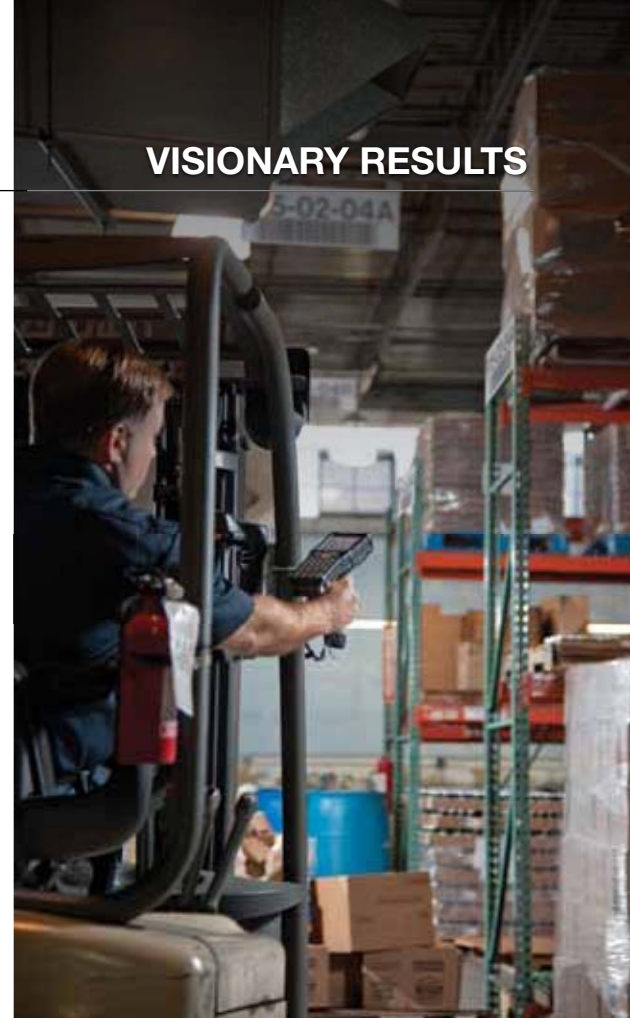
“When we initially came in to help Damco transition from pen and paper to barcoding and handheld computing, it was a little overwhelming,” says Stuart Smith, owner and co-founder of VCW. “There were a lot of logistical issues to overcome.”

One of the most practical challenges they faced was finding a durable barcode scanner capable of scanning labels on shelved pallets 30 feet above their heads on the second or third shelf. “I needed one piece of equipment that was capable of meeting all of our needs,” says Zambrana. “In addition to moving product in and out of our warehouse accurately, I also need to manage my team and the hardware and software they use on a daily basis. I don’t have the bandwidth to manage four or five different devices. I need one device that can do it all.”

Thankfully, Smith and VCW already had a solution in mind that could handle Damco’s challenge. “Stuart came to us, sat down and looked at our business; then he calculated the process flow and suggested the best tools to solve our problem,” says Zambrana.

“Damco has their guys on an all-concrete floor. They have guys working two or three stories up on pallets and forklifts. They needed a mobile device with a high drop rate and only a handful of products fit that description,” says Smith. “In the beginning we tested a couple of different products, but once you start testing you can usually determine pretty quickly which one best meets the client’s needs.”

Based on that early demo, Smith suggested that Damco look at Motorola’s Mobile Computing Solution. “The suggestion of Motorola was an easy one, in some ways,” says Smith. “As the world leader in the mobile computer industry, their MC9190-G seemed like the perfect fit. But we wanted to make sure before we rolled it out to all their locations.”





To ensure the Motorola device would address all of Damco's needs, VCW ran a series of demos at their South Gate location to confirm the software was compatible with Damco's legacy systems. They also used that time to bring Zambrano's associates up to speed on how to use the mobile computers to accomplish all their daily inbound and outbound tasks—without using a pencil.

"The testing phase is something you want to get right the first time," says Smith. "We wanted a nice long process to make sure the hardware and software were going to work long-term."

After 45 days of testing, they knew they'd found the right solution. "This mobile computer allows our team to capture and exchange all the business-critical shipping and receiving information we need to maximize our accuracy and reduce downtime," says Zambrana. "We use the Motorola mobile computers to scan inbound and outbound cartons for our customers that are being shipped, cross-docked or forwarded on to our other distribution centers. It helps us with inventory, volume count accuracy, labels required for shipping—even generating bills of lading and reports."

This solution has been in place for a couple of years and Zambrana couldn't be happier. "The success we encountered in the initial rollout convinced us to roll out to our other distribution centers," he says. "Each deployment brought its own unique set of challenges, but VCW has been with us every step of the way and so far we've upgraded just about every location (over a dozen) across the U.S."

Overall, Damco Distribution has reduced downtime, increased accuracy and optimized their business to compete in the fast-paced world of logistics. "VCW is very knowledgeable about the technology," says Zambrana. "They understand our business, too. In fact, they're more a part of our own team here than any service provider or vendor. They are easy to reach and very helpful all the way around. I recommend them very highly."

If you'd like to upgrade your business to a mobile computing solution, contact the experts at VCW today.



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