

Lydia® wins performance comparison

Fit for future: Fressnapf is prepared for further growth with Pick by Voice

Only the best is good enough for your beloved pet. It goes without saying that the Fressnapf Group sets this standard for its product range and its own logistics processes: Instead of being satisfied with the proven order picking system at the two warehouse locations Feuchtwangen and Krefeld, the specialist chain for pet food and accessories started looking for a more efficient solution. In a practical test, the latest order picking technologies were thoroughly tested. Only one system could meet the performance requirements of a professional warehouse environment: Pick by Voice. The smart language assistant Lydia® from topsystem prevailed over alternative technologies such as Pick by Vision.

What began in 1990 with a market in Erkelenz, North Rhine-Westphalia, is today Europe's largest specialist chain for pet food and accessories: the Fressnapf Group. In around 1,500 markets in eleven countries, animal lovers from Denmark to Italy will find a wide range of products for dogs, cats and the like. All Fressnapf branches and end customers are supplied from five national locations with a total area of 143,000 m². The Fressnapf Group operates two of these warehouses itself: the 60,000 m² logistics centre in Krefeld and the 20,000 m² Feuchtwangen regional warehouse. Both locations have a large parts area for manual order picking. Around 2,500 fast-moving items are stored there in Feuchtwangen and around 8,000 articles in Krefeld.

Electronic picking list is a thing of the past

Since the beginning of 2006 Fressnapf has been using electronic picking lists (EPL) for picking. These were provided on a monitor attached directly to the

industrial truck. "We developed the graphical user interface ourselves and adapted it to our individual needs. We paid particular attention to clarity and ease of operation. This enabled us to increase the picking performance by 15% and reduce the error rate by 20%," reports Gerhard Kunkel, Head of Outbound Logistics at Fressnapf. However, there were limits to the optimisation potential of the EPL and thus to further increases in efficiency. Since the Fressnapf Group is committed to constantly critically reviewing and continuously improving internal processes, the company was looking for an even more efficient system for manual order picking. "In order to keep pace with the company's further growth and increasing customer orders, we needed a new solution that would increase productivity and at the same time be flexible and easy to use," says Gerhard Kunkel, summarising the objective.

Order picking solutions undergoing practical testing

The Fressnapf Group tested powerful and future-proof systems for manual order picking such as Pick by Light and Pick by Voice as well as the use of Pick by Vision data glasses for their potential suitability for use with regard to the previously defined requirement profile. "We created identical test orders for each of the selected systems and had them commissioned by different employees under practical conditions. We then evaluated the systems on the basis of predefined criteria," explains Gerhard Kunkel. In this way, Fressnapf received concrete figures such as performance values and error rates. This approach enabled an objective performance comparison of the various picking solutions.

Voice beats Vision

The result was a real surprise for Gerhard Kunkel: "For me, it was clear from the very beginning that we would introduce a pick by vision solution, because I considered this system to be particularly effective and future-proof". In the test, however, it turned out that the technology currently being intensively advertised did not achieve the desired performance data. In comparison to other solutions, Pick by Vision performed weaker, for example, in the areas of occupational safety

and duration of energy supply. Because Fressnapf attaches great importance to the opinion of its employees, selected order pickers were actively involved in the selection process. "I received feedback from the employees involved that the desired increase in productivity in the picking process could not be achieved with the data glasses," says Gerhard Kunkel. Another point of criticism related to ergonomics. "The use of data glasses over several hours puts a particular strain on the eyes due to the continuous change between the physical warehouse environment and virtual information," adds Gerhard Kunkel.

Instead of the initially favored pick by vision process, another system prevailed against the competition in the field test. "In the tests, Pick by Voice proved to be the system best suited to our requirements. We ultimately chose topsystem as our solution provider because Lydia® does not require any language training for employees and delivers first-class results in speech recognition, which in turn ensures a fast workflow and maximum acceptance among employees," says Gerhard Kunkel. topsystem's Lydia® convinced the jury with its intuitive operation and easy-to-remember voice dialog, which all warehouse employees can quickly learn regardless of their native language. This enables order pickers to work productively with the system in the shortest possible time. Another plus point: for optimum ergonomic working conditions, employees can choose between a headset and the Lydia® VoiceWear® picking vest.

Lydia® boosts performance

In the two large parts areas in the Feuchtwangen and Krefeld warehouses, around 360 order pickers now work together with Lydia® Voice. The system guides the employees through the warehouse in a route-optimized manner, indicating the pallet storage location and the correct number of units to be removed. The order picker then places the goods only on the corresponding load carrier, for example on a pallet or in a box. Since the introduction of Lydia® Voice, the Fressnapf Group has recorded a further 10% increase in productivity at both warehouse locations. The number of picks has improved from 190 to 205 packages per hour. "We had not expected such a positive development in

performance at this level," says Gerhard Kunkel. In addition, since the use of Lydia® the error rate has been significantly reduced by almost 50% to just 0.2%. One of the reasons for this is the Hands-free/Eyes-free concept, which allows full concentration on the picking process. "The use of Lydia® has also enabled us to reduce the number of accidents at work, as employees are more focused and no longer distracted by looking at the picking list," says Gerhard Kunkel. The Fressnapf Group is currently planning a new project with topsystem to achieve further process optimisation: The two companies intend to work together intensively on workforce management in the future.

topsystem Systemhaus GmbH

topsystem Systemhaus GmbH is a total solution provider for voice-guided work processes and with its voice suite Lydia® technology leader in this field. The company has been developing process optimization solutions for the automotive, retail, production, logistics and maintenance industries since 1995. topsystem offers standardized IT products as well as individual IT developments. The core of topsystem's range of services are the hardware and software solutions developed in-house. These include the Voxter® mobile voice client and the innovative Lydia® Voice Wear® voice vest. The portfolio is supplemented by comprehensive process consulting and after-sales service. Basis of all achievements are the profound technological specialized knowledge as well as the distinctive and industry knowledge of many years of the system house. topsystem has a world-wide branched sales network and is represented by an extensive network of integration partners global.