

# LINE OF SIGHT DATA TRACKING IN THE SUPPLY CHAIN

As a result of the COVID-19 disruption, businesses have learned to adapt to changing external circumstances. The COVID-19 pandemic response brought sudden and significant changes to the supply chain in 2020 that continue into 2021. From shipping delays to a surge in e-commerce, the ability to track data efficiently has become increasingly valuable.

Whether you work in a warehouse, factory, shipping network or carrier service, every part of the chain involves a unique process that can be monitored and improved with proper data tracking. These solutions bring forth a leap in productivity and accuracy, which as a result, reduces the risk of lost product and cost. By putting data at the forefront of your business, businesses can track, monitor and compare data to create a more efficient and productive chain of operations.

## WHY IS DATA VISIBILITY IMPORTANT?

Data visibility refers to the ability to produce, monitor and analyze the information that is produced and recorded within a business. Our demand for instant gratification, 24/7 service and on-demand digital access is growing. According to Statistics Canada, between November 2019 and November 2020, Canada saw a 110-per cent increase in online sales. This digital revolution has changed expectations in service and upended the supply chain, impacting manufacturers, retailers and warehousing operations.

If the operations of a business have gaps, the added urgency brought on by the pandemic will only further erode areas of weak-

ness. The smart application of data capture technologies can help to improve productivity while providing a better employee experience.

By collecting and tracking data in critical business functions and by mobilizing your workforce, you can begin to weed out problematic areas that cost you time and money. Effective data tracking creates a big-picture view of your company and allows an objective overview of your business trends and trajectory. Data visibility is security for both your business and your staff. By understanding the numbers behind the business, you can make educated choices that benefit the company, and more important, the customer.

## HOW TO ACHIEVE VISIBILITY

Traditional methods of tracking productivity are outdated and leave room for human error. By introducing technology-based solutions, you can create visually comprehensive data that will enable your ability to make better business decisions. You can increase data visibility through tools and technology, specifically with barcoding and RFID technology. To address what a company needs, you must start with a thorough review of your business goals, current processes, and mobile workforce needs. By putting strategy first, you can then recommend the right technology for the job.

Barcoding data capture systems are the most affordable and effective way to automate your company's collection of data. Barcodes can be implemented in almost any industry and used to provide concise data. These barcodes allow versatile, durable and reliable tracking through the

use of a sticky, scannable barcode tab. A worthwhile investment in barcoding technology involves integrating the right combination of software, label type, printers, mobile computers and label stock. The combination ensures that the data is reliable and tracked for the best investment.

Another way to capture data in your daily business operations is to use radio frequency identification technology, known as RFID. RFID tags benefit areas of operations that prioritize data capture without a line-of-sight scan. These tags are useful in cutting cost and error margins within a company. Businesses involved in manufacturing, distribution, retailing and inventory and asset management can track, manage and operate based on the information provided with RFID tags. Actions that would typically take several hours, such as inventory cycle counts or unloading inbound containers, can be done efficiently in half the time thanks to RFID tags.

One example of RFID and barcoding technology in use would be a biopharma research organization that uses barcodes and RFID to manage its inventory of reagents, chemicals and supplies. The organization's biggest challenge was counting their inventory of reagents in freezer storage – stored at -80 Fahrenheit. Every 30 days, the company has to verify that all 6000-plus serialized, uniquely tracked reagents in storage were still there, via a cycle count. This was previously done using heavy-duty protective clothing and a manual count that took more than 30 hours to count, validate, verify and adjust. Using RealView with barcoded RFID labels and an in-freezer RFID



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reader, the organization can now cycle count the freeze items in less than an hour and update their NetSuite ERP with the correct values – without having to enter the freezer. This process has allowed the company to be more integrated, efficient and effective.

As with barcoding, RFID is most impactful when designed and integrated with the business goals in mind. RFID tagging systems will not provide ROI unless the solution architecture is in place, including proper readers, printers and software integrated into the company's backend systems. Investing in improving your data collection processes with technology is the first step in future-proofing your business for long-term success. **SP**