

Warehouse Coach

Improving warehouse performance

Maintain and Use Accurate Data

By Don Benson – www.warehousecoach.com

I imagine most of us have talked with a vendor or read about the wonderful results others have accomplished the result of implementing a Warehouse Management System. Having been involved in the specification, design and implementation of many Warehouse Management Systems (WMS) for over 25 years, I have seen that while they have a great deal to offer, many of the benefits that a WMS can provide can be accomplished without the investment. In many of the articles on this site, I present recommendations from my experience in WMS design and implementation that you should be able to implement on your own at a substantially reduced cost. My suggestions will probably require you to spend some money, but they will be much more affordable, yield a measurable improvement in operations, and help you become a more intelligent consumer when the time comes to purchase and install your WMS.

The first and perhaps the most important category of change you can implement yourself build the data in your existing system and keep it clean. While an effective WMS is only as good as the data in it, manual methods, procedures, and a good staff in your warehouse are often effective in spite of bad or inconsistent data. One example that impacts most operations in many areas is the knowledge of the physical characteristics for each SKU; weight, measurements, and pieces per case (carton count). Accurate and complete SKU data are absolutely required for any system to support you in your work, and if the data is complete and correct, it can allow you to achieve many operational benefits,

With accurate data you will find more opportunities to improve performance. On the other hand bad data can eliminate the potential for any of these productivity and quality improvements and will negatively impact profitability.

In many companies, the responsibility and authority for data accuracy is unclear. The key to data quality is to take this responsibility yourself, in the warehouse. No department in the company has as much to gain from good data as the warehouse, and yet many Departments actually have nothing to lose by entering bad data.

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I have frequently heard the story about how the Buying staff entered “1’s” to fill the SKU information data fields, I have seen significantly wrong dimensions printed on boxes in manufacturing plants, incorrect data on product information sheets, seen inconsistent case counts by SKU from vendors, and seen the wrong carton contents information printed on the carton. In each of these instances, there seemed to have been no one assigned the responsibility for the correctness of the data. In each of these situations, the one department that has a stake in the data being correct is your warehouse, and the worst part is that the results of bad data usually fall to your warehouse for blame or correction.

You can expect that others in your company will complain about your efforts to clean up the data, because this work can bring to light the quality of their work, possibly require them to change their procedures and probably expend more effort in data collection. Consequently, to be successful consider working with other managers to develop a clear agreement about the overall impact of good data on the bottom line, and the critical role in keeping the data complete and accurate. Your voice needs to carry the authority to make the changes happen since the warehouse usually bears the responsibility for correcting the results of bad data. This will not be easy. But in the long run you have just two options: clean it up now or later. Then the question is can you do it now or do you wait to pay a WMS vendor to do it for you? The choice is yours.

In the next several columns I will discuss some approaches to cleaning up the data. I look forward to hearing from you about your experiences and results. You can reach me at coach@warehousecoach.com.