

Awana Turns to Jennifer™ For Picking, Receiving, Replenishment and Returns



ABOUT AWANA CLUBS INTERNATIONAL

Awana Clubs International is a non-profit organization providing youth and children's ministry programs and materials to more than 12,000 churches in the U.S. and 4,100 churches in over 100 other countries. Its 82,000-square-foot distribution center in Schaumburg, Illinois ships directly to registered churches and stocks 2,400 items ranging from books and pamphlets to games, trophies, apparel, and small novelty items such as pens, pins, stickers and bookmarks. To better serve its clubs and improve efficiency, Awana has implemented voice technology throughout the distribution center.



Company Profile

Non-profit youth and children's ministry serving more than 16,000 churches worldwide

Founded in 1950 in Chicago, IL with current headquarters in Streamwood, IL

Distributes 2,400 items from distribution center in Schaumburg, IL

Over 160,000 orders per year and average of nine-plus items per order (20 items during peak season, August to October)

Customer Comments

"With Jennifer, we saved so much money the first year on the shipping side that we knew we could get additional benefits by deploying Jennifer in other areas."

"The implementation was flawless. Lucas has done this often enough that they know the questions to ask, the parameters to set, and what needs to be done to have a successful deployment."

THE OPPORTUNITY

According to Steve Hale, Director of Distribution at Awana: "Seven years ago Awana was shipping in 11 days, so we started making a lot of changes to meet the goal of 'out the door in 24 (hours).' We temporarily added a second shift and also started hiring temporary workers, especially during our heavy times. Fifty percent of our yearly orders ship in August, September and October." Through these changes, Awana cut shipping time to one day for 99 percent of orders. Adds Hale, "When we brought in temps there were tons of errors." At that time, Awana was using a paper-based picking system.

After products are picked, they are sent to packing stations where 70 percent of orders were audited, but during the busy months only 50 percent were checked before shipping. As a result, many orders were shipped with errors. Awana estimated the cost per error at \$13.

Awana was considering various technology solutions to improve accuracy, including voice and pick-to-light, and they decided on voice based on a lower cost, faster ROI and easier acceptance among employees. Based on partner recommendations and his own industry research, Hale contacted Lucas Systems. He was interested in using voice for picking and other operations, but the initial focus was picking as that has the largest, clearest impact on costs. Based on an engineering study by Lucas Systems engineers, Lucas implemented the Jennifer™ system for voice-directed picking at Awana in April 2004. Based on the success of that project, Awana has since extended Jennifer to support receiving, replenishment and returns processing.

THE SOLUTION

Jennifer was customized to fit into Awana order fulfillment processes and requirements, and also included new label printing, short-filling and QC functionality that Awana needed. Says Hale, "The Lucas engineers didn't try to change my operations unless it would improve things for the better."

"The implementation was flawless," he says. "Lucas has done this often enough that they know the questions to ask, the parameters to set, and what needs to be done beforehand to have a successful deployment. The key is to manage the project closely and keep an eye on the milestones. And you must have someone on your side who knows your system inside and out. You can't just expect the vendor to do it all."

Working with Jennifer, pickers are instructed which items to pick in what quantities, and they confirm the quantity and item verbally (using a three-digit check string printed on the item location) as they place it in the appropriate tote for that order. According to Hale, verbal confirmation plays a big part in improving accuracy – incorrect counts were the number one cause of errors. Pickers also tell Jennifer if a slot is empty and that information is relayed immediately to managers and associates at a short filling area.



About Lucas Systems

Lucas has delivered more voice-directed logistics solutions for distribution centers on a wider variety of mobile computers than any other company.

We work with market leaders in many industries -- food and beverage, retail, 3PL, manufacturing, and healthcare -- to provide solutions that always increase accuracy, productivity and employee satisfaction.

Our solutions use best-of-breed voice technology and multi-modal, open platform mobile computers from vendors such as Symbol, Intermec, and LXE.

For more information, contact us at (724) 940-7000 or visit www.lucasware.com.

Besides the voice picking capabilities, Lucas also provided quality control functionality using barcode scanning at the packing stations. From a maximum of 70 percent QC before Jennifer, Awana is now checking every order that ships. "Our order accuracy out the door is virtually 100 percent," says Hale.

According to Hale, accuracy and productivity gains resulting from Jennifer exceeded expectations. "Jennifer paid for itself in less than 13 months, and we didn't even capture the full cost benefits of fewer errors."

In 2005 Awana started rolling out Jennifer in other areas. "While accuracy was the main goal of the picking application, productivity was the big driver for adding voice in returns, receiving and replenishment," notes Hale.

The Awana returns process was next to get Jennifer. Previously, associates in the returns area would manually look up customer and product codes and tag each returned item with the appropriate location. With Jennifer, they speak the customer or invoice number and the item number, and Jennifer instructs them to place the item in a numbered tote. Other associates use Jennifer to return the items to stock. These associates tell Jennifer the tote number, and Jennifer directs the associate to the first replenishment location. The associate confirms the location and quantity before Jennifer will move on to the next item in the tote. Similar to picking, verbal confirmation on put away ensures that the right item is put in the right location.

Last year, Awana implemented Jennifer in receiving and replenishment, replacing manual, paper-based processes that were inefficient and error-prone.

THE RESULT

According to Hale, "Before Jennifer we had an internal error rate in picking of nine percent, and with temps it was more like 35 to 40 percent." Using Jennifer in picking and QC, errors were reduced 80 percent and order accuracy out the door is approaching 100 percent compared to 97 percent before. Adds Hale, "Although productivity wasn't our driving factor, it went up significantly. We were expecting a 15 percent productivity increase, but now we are at 35 percent improvement. Our average picking productivity was 113 lines per hour per employee. It's now up around 195 to 200 lines per hour, and we've had four employees who have joined the 300 club, picking at the rate of 300 lines per hour for a full shift."

Awana is currently compiling detailed metrics on the returns, replenishment, and receiving functions. In addition to improved productivity, Hale says that better accuracy in replenishment and returns (return to stock) has directly impacted picking accuracy, making less re-work at the QC/packing stations.

Hale also says that Jennifer reduced training time to about two hours, which is especially important during their peak season when they hire a lot of temporary workers, primarily high school and college students. "Some people are ready to go five minutes after training the system. And most of them say it is so much fun working this way."