

# Voice Picking and Loading System Eliminates Errors and Slashes Manhours at Pate Dawson Company



**Pate Dawson** is a leading regional foodservice distributor in the Southeastern US. The fourth-generation family-owned business operates a 116,000 square foot DC in Goldsboro, NC.

## Goals

Improve order accuracy, productivity, and customer service.

## Application

Jennifer™ VoicePlus Voice Directed Picking and Truck Loading (English and Spanish)

## Key Results

- Reduced picking errors to 1 in 15,000 cases per week – 99.99 percent accuracy.
- Increased picking rates to 250 cases per hour (from 85 cph before voice) by eliminating non-picking time and improving pick process efficiency.
- Eliminated truck shorts and improved efficiency of delivery process for drivers and customers.
- Reduced manpower and overtime while improving accuracy and customer service.

When Pate Dawson Company was considering voice technology in 2005 they were hoping to see big improvements in picking accuracy, along with gains in productivity. “At that time our order selectors averaged 85 cases per hour, with a maximum of about 100 cases per hour,” says Joe Perkins, Facility Manager of the company’s Goldsboro DC. “We started picking on one shift at 11 am and we would finish up on the next shift at two or three am. And our error rate was more than one in 1000 cases. Our main goal for voice was to reduce those errors and improve productivity.”

Four years after implementing the Jennifer™ Voice-Plus voice picking system from Lucas Systems, Perkins says the average



weekly error rate is 1 in 15,000 cases. “We are having our best year ever in terms of customer adjustments, and the average picking rate per man-hour is now 250 cases. Because of that, we went from more than 30 selectors over two shifts to 12 order selectors who start at 2 pm and finish up between 9:30 and 11 pm.”

In 2009 Pate Dawson added a Jennifer voice-directed truck loading application that has improved efficiency and accuracy of the loading process, as well as making the delivery process easier for drivers – saving time and ensuring complete order delivery.

## Before Voice: Low Productivity With Pick-by-Label

Pate Dawson ships frozen, refrigerated and dry food products to chains and independent restaurants. To help ensure truck drivers deliver the right products to the right customers, pickers at the DC apply a label containing product and customer information to each case they pick. Prior to voice, selectors used the case labels printed by the Target Data Systems warehouse management system to guide them through their picking assignments. This pick-by-label process required additional staff time to print and organize the labels, and order selectors also spent significant time every shift retrieving, managing and sorting the labels prior to picking.

With the pick-by-label approach, selector productivity averaged 85 cases per man-hour, which included non-productive time managing labels, hand-writing catch weights, and recording other assignment information. In addition, selection error rates were greater than one per 1000 cases. To minimize shipping errors, Pate audited a high percentage of orders after picking, which added to costs. Managers at Pate Dawson wanted to further reduce shipping errors without increasing audit costs, and improve productivity. To meet the goals, they selected the Jennifer VoicePlus solution from Lucas Systems.

## Process Engineering to Optimize the Voice Processes

Prior to implementing the Jennifer system at Pate Dawson, Lucas conducted an engineering study to identify every possible opportunity to reduce errors and drive productivity gains. Beyond the inherent productivity and accuracy advantages of eyes- and hands-free voice picking, the Lucas Engineering Study outlined ways in which a Jennifer voice system could eliminate non-picking time, improve the processes for short-filling and substitutions, better prioritize audit resources, and improve the loading process to eliminate errors, improve efficiency and provide truck drivers with a more accurate load map.



"We are having our best year ever in terms of customer adjustments, and the average picking rate per man-hour is now 250 cases."

"We went from more than 30 selectors over two shifts to 12 order selectors who start at 2 pm and finish up between 9:30 and 11 pm."

"Jennifer plays the major part in reducing errors and increasing productivity. She takes away the doubt and fear that selectors have that if they go faster they are going to make more mistakes."

- Joe Perkins,  
Pate Dawson  
Company

#### About Lucas

Lucas Systems has delivered more voice-directed warehouse applications on a wider variety of mobile computers than any other company.

For more information, call us at 724-940-7000 or online at [www.lucasware.com](http://www.lucasware.com)

Among other improvements, Lucas recommended that the voice system control the printing of labels to eliminate pre-printing and sorting, and to give selectors an optimized picking sequence. The operations team at the DC also decided to relocate the label printers to the wrapping station, so selectors could save the time and steps required to walk back to the check-out desk for their next assignment. "The selectors are already stopped and off their pallet jacks to wrap their pallets, so it makes sense to let them print their next set of labels," says Perkins. "This small change probably added 5-10 cases per hour in productivity."

#### Additional Benefits of Voice: Improved Loading, Auditing and Training

"We've put a lot of programs in place to reduce damage and other claims, and we've raised our productivity goals as we implemented voice," says Perkins. "But Jennifer plays the major part in reducing errors and increasing productivity. It takes away the doubt and fear that selectors have that if they go faster they are going to make more mistakes."

The Jennifer voice loading application has helped loading dock personnel keep up with the faster pace of picking, adds Perkins. Working with Jennifer, loaders confirm by voice that they are loading the correct pallets on the correct trucks, and they "tell" Jennifer where they are placing each pallet. Based on user input, Jennifer prints a load map so drivers can find the items they need at each stop on their delivery route.

"We are loading more pallets per hour with the same number of people on the loading dock as before," says Perkins. "And they have more time to keep the dock organized and clean, and to help out in other areas, if needed. And loading with Jennifer increases accountability to make sure the right pallets get on the right trucks."

In addition to the hands-on voice process, the Jennifer system includes a management console that provides other operational benefits, including allowing managers to prioritize and manage which pallets are audited. "With Jennifer, supervisors can set different audit parameters. For example, for a new customer we might audit 100 percent of their first three orders, then reduce that to 50 percent, and so on. Or we can audit a higher percentage of orders picked by newer selectors." Perkins says this helps ensure they are auditing the assignments that need it most, rather than manually selecting which pallets to audit.

Training is also accelerated with Jennifer, according to Perkins. "It used to take two weeks of training before we could let a new selector pick orders. Now, we started a new selector last month and after training him on the operation of the jack, we had him create a voice model and turned him loose the first day. He had no errors to start out with and as he got better at stacking a pallet, his productivity steadily improved."