

Maines Paper & Food Service: Stocking Up on Technology

Maines Paper & Food Service is the fifth largest foodservice distributor in the United States. Supplying restaurants (including regional and national chains), healthcare facilities, educational institutions, cruise lines and other such customers, Maines projects \$1.4 billion in revenue this year. That's a far cry from 1919 when Floyd Maines, Sr. started selling "nickel" Hershey® Bars and Reese's® Peanut Butter Cups to local grocers, and orders averaged just \$20. Since then, Maines has witnessed — and led — many changes, including the growth of voice technology: today's way to talk "Warehouse Management."

The Challenge:

Managing Information,
Inventory and Operations

Over the past 84 years, Maines Paper & Food Service has expanded its products and services to the point where it can provide foodservice customers with virtually everything they want and need. Today it is truly a "full-line" distributor, serving thousands of customers throughout the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Midwest.

In addition to a vast array of foods — meats, seafood, dairy, deli, produce, beverage, frozen food, etc. — the company carries an amazing range of non-food products and supplies. Customers can order everything from commercial ovens to uniforms, tableware and cleaning supplies, even kitchen design services.



But Maines knows that, for customers, what matters even more than a full product line is being sure they'll get what they need, when they need it.

That's why the company has built an extensive distribution system, spanning six facilities. It's anchored by a 300,000-square-foot distribution center near Binghamton, NY, where 60-70 order selectors work each shift, every day. In an average week, they'll log 400,000 picks at this facility alone.

And, thanks to Maines' continued growth, there's an ever-increasing volume of product to move. To keep up with growing demands — and forge ahead in a highly competitive industry — Maines knows how vital it is to manage information, inventory and warehousing operations better than ever before.

"Talkman was the easiest install of any system I've ever worked with."

Bill Kimler

Director of Systems
and Inventory Control
Maines Paper & Food Service

Voice Results

Objectives

- Accuracy as #1 priority
- Real-time information proactive management

Application

- Order selection: case, "each," and catch-weight picking

Installation

- Manhattan Associates PkMS®
- Vocollect Talkman® T2 computers: 100
- 802.11b RF system

Results

- Accuracy increased to 99.97%

ROI

- Payback achieved in 12 months

Future Improvements

- Accuracy up to 99.99%
- Differentiation in a challenging industry

"I was a skeptic until I saw the Talkman system at work – in the real world, with real people. Now I'm a believer."

Bill Kimler

Director of Systems and Inventory Control
Maines Paper & Food Service

The Solution:

Technology Engineers for the DC

Looking forward, Maines Paper & Food Service upgraded the Warehouse Management System at its flagship Binghamton DC last year. Its choice: the next-generation of PkMS® by Manhattan Associates, known for its extended supply chain execution (x-SCETM) solution.

The upgrade ensures that Information Technology will remain a core competency at Maines: a way to deliver on its commitment to be part of the solution for customers, and to be as easy to do business with as possible.

With these goals in mind, Maines also installed the Talkman® system by Vocollect. Decision makers had investigated voice technology thoroughly, and were convinced that it is both mature and proven. In site visits, they had also seen how well the Talkman system works in rugged, noisy environments, and how well suited it is to critical warehouse applications.

Maines also reports being impressed with the practical knowledge and experience that Vocollect has built into very aspect of its Talkman system, including the solidly-engineered Talkman T2 computer. It was clear that Vocollect knows the warehouse and understands how end-users such as order selectors work. To Maines, this real-world expertise spoke volumes.

The Talkman system, described by Bill Kimler, Director of Systems and Inventory Control, as his easiest installation — ever — was up and running within a few days. It immediately gave order selectors a more natural and intuitive way of doing their jobs: simply listening and responding to spoken commands.

Maines has also incorporated a full-featured interface that connects PkMS and the Talkman system and keeps the two in constant communication. Real-time information empowers proactive inventory management.

The Result:

Closing in on Perfect Accuracy

As Maines' newest, most advanced site, Binghamton was already very accurate on order selection: nearly 99.9 percent. However, with 400,000 picks a week — more than 20,000,000 a year — even 1/10 of one percent in errors becomes very significant.

With the Talkman system in place, errors have dropped to between 1/3 and 1/4 of what they had been. What's more, as Kimler reports, Maines is driving toward an even lower error rate — 1:9,000 — to reach 99.99 percent accuracy. Near-perfect accuracy all but eliminates re-work, returns, credits and other costly steps.

In fact, based on savings that are directly related to improved accuracy, Maines calculates that the Talkman system paid for itself within its first year on the job. Also, though it's harder to quantify, having a world class order selection system has clearly been a boon for the company in terms of marketing, enabling it to sign up additional customers.

Other benefits to factor in: various ways in which the system enables selectors to "work smarter." For example, they can research the status of slots at any time to check on shorts. In fact, by reporting shorts via their Talkman terminal as they go through their assignments, they initiate the replenishment process on the spot. Selectors can also specify one of six stations to print their next batch of labels. This allows selectors to start their next assignment at the nearest location, without a trip to a central office. They're automatically logged in and their labels, ready and waiting.

For Maines, the key is that the benefits of voice are multiplied across a high-volume, labor-intensive environment, where improved accuracy and productivity translate into impressive cost savings. Big-time results — fast. 🚀



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Vocollect. Voice-Directed Distribution.

Since pioneering voice recognition for industry in 1987, Vocollect has set the standard for warehouses and other business settings. Together, its market-leading Talkman® wearable mobile computer and integrated software suite cut operating costs by eliminating errors and improving worker productivity shift after shift.

Leading WMS providers, material handling integrators and specialty voice solution providers around the world choose the performance and reliability of Vocollect to deliver integrated voice-directed distribution solutions. And every day, over 60,000 workers around the globe rely on Vocollect's integrated voice solution to help improve their operations.