

Systeme U: voice at the service of quality!

Systeme U is an association of independent retailers, with 850 stores, specialising in "fresh produce" and "self-service", based throughout France. The group is organised around 4 regional branches, which are also independent (apart from the national purchasing branch). These branches include Systeme U's Eastern France branch serving almost 200 stores, from the Belgian and German borders to the Rhône-Alpes region and the border with the North of Italy. These stores are supplied from 6 warehouses totalling almost 150,000 m². The warehouse in Rumilly (Haute-Savoie) is the most recent, dedicated to high-volume and high-turnover grocery products.



The Challenge:

quality was the primary objective

"For some years now, we have been looking into ways to improve the preparation function" reveals Bernard Reverchon, the Logistics Director of Systeme U's Eastern France branch. "From receipt through to shipment, the entire function chain in our warehouses was based on scanning equipment and narrowband RF networks. The exception was order preparation, which has been carried out using paper slips." "Equipping commissioners' trucks with screen terminals did not offer any real advantage in terms of quality and productivity. And although it looked promising, voice technology seemed lacking in maturity".

"Until recently in France, except in special cases, broadband radio transmission was reserved for military use. This presented an obstacle to the adoption of voice technology, which needs broadband to operate". "By the time Systeme U's Rumilly warehouse had been built, this obstacle had been removed. It was therefore decided to equip the site with broadband with a view to installing a voice system".

"Quality was our primary objective and not productivity", continues Bernard Reverchon. The objective was ambitious, to reduce the error and dispute rate in orders by a factor of 5 to 10.

It was reached: the vocal solution introduction reduced the error rate from 1.5 to 2 per 1000 picks to just 0.2 to 0.4 per 1000.

"Vocollect's Talkman™ technology proved to be the most suitable solution for our standard WMS tool."

Bernard Reverchon
Logistics Director
Systeme U,
Eastern France branch

Voice results

Objectives

- Improve quality of orders by reducing the error and dispute rate by a factor of 5 to 10

Application

- 40,000 m² warehouse
- Order preparation and processing, platform by platform, predetermined by the warehouse management system
- Grocery products, and extension to fresh produce to ensure their traceability rapidly and contribute to the management of variable-weight goods

Installation

- 70 Vocollect Talkman™ T2 terminals
- Integration in existing management system
- RF installation

Results

- Reduction in the error rate from 1.5/2 per 1000 packages to 0.2/0.4 in the space of a few months
- Potential gain in productivity of at least 10%

Future improvements

- Extend the voice solution to Système U's entire Eastern France branch, totalling 400 operators

"In the field, our commissioners particularly appreciate the benefits of a "Hands-free, Eyes-free™" solution, in terms of ease of use and especially safety."

Bernard Reverchon
Logistics Director
Système U,
Eastern France
branch

The Solution:

Vocollect's Talkman™ technology, indisputably the most effective solution

"Vocollect's Talkman™ technology offered by Zetes, the company's distributor in France, proved to be the most suitable solution for our standard warehouse management system (WMS) tool". After a short trial period, Talkman was installed in January 2003, with a progressive roll-out over the following months. Seventy warehouse staff at the Rumilly warehouse were equipped with receivers and microphones connected to Vocollect Talkman™ terminals, attached to their belt. Through an RF network (also supplied and installed by Zetes), the WMS communicates to each terminal the order of work to be completed. The terminal converts the request into voice instructions, guiding the worker step by step through the tasks. Each response action is validated verbally until the task has been completed. With a view to preventing any removal errors, the worker is required to read a reference number indicated at the point where the removed product is located. Clear instructions and comprehensive real-time reporting means that the Talkman system offers complete accuracy, with a rate of 99.99%. In addition, the "Hands-free, Eyes-free™" style of working means that employees are no longer interrupted from the task at hand. Système U's Eastern France branch has placed its confidence in voice and its French distributor: "Zetes provided the resources we required and made all the necessary software adaptations rapidly, particularly for the interface with our WMS, resulting in a seamless integration," said Mr Reverchon. "The supplier's expertise in both radio and voice solutions was also a valuable asset". Zetes' proven capabilities meant it was selected to install broadband radio equipment in all Système U's Eastern France branch's warehouses, in preparation for the implementation of Talkman™ voice solutions in these sites. "We gave priority to the preparation of fresh produce orders, for which voice technology can improve quality management further, in terms of product traceability. Similarly, the combination of voice and scanning is beneficial for recording variable-weight goods," said Mr Reverchon.

The Result:

significant improvement of order preparation and many other benefits

For the Système U retail group, voice technology has delivered on its promises improving warehouse order preparation significantly. The arrival of Talkman solution at the Eastern France branch cut: the error rate from 1.5 to 2 per 1000 picks to just 0.2 to 0.4 per 1000. This gain alone has justified the investment, with Système U outlets no longer needing to conduct systematic checks of deliveries from the Rumilly warehouse. Having been involved in the project from the outset, staff have adapted easily to the new system. In the field, workers particularly appreciate the benefits of a "Hands-free, Eyes-free™" solution, in terms of ease of use and safety. Furthermore, Bernard Reverchon has identified a number of potential opportunities for the business as the solution is mastered internally, e.g. real-time stock tracking, shorter turnaround and improved "control" with respect to transport constraints. "In terms of pure productivity, the potential gain is at least 10%," said Mr Reverchon. Indeed, Système U is only starting to reap the potential benefits offered by voice technology. ▄

VOICE-DIRECTED RETAIL REAL-TIME MANAGEMENT.



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Vocollect. Voice-Directed Distribution.

Since pioneering voice recognition for industrial applications in 1987, Vocollect has set the standard for voice-directed distribution systems for warehouse and industrial operations, and today is the world's leading provider of voice integrated solutions.

Together, its market-leading Talkman wearable mobile systems and its integrated software suite cut operating costs by eliminating errors and improving worker productivity and safety shift after shift, with a payback in less than 12 months. 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 80,000 workers around the globe rely on Vocollect's integrated voice solution to help improve their companies operations and profitability.

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