



# Imperial Distributors Modernizes With Lucas



## Meeting the Challenge of Growth in an Existing DC

Facing rapid growth amid industry consolidation, the team at Imperial Distributors Auburn, MA DC was challenged in meeting customer demands for accurate, on-time delivery in the face of increasing shipping volumes. With the Lucas Mobile Work Execution System, Imperial dramatically improved outbound accuracy and picking productivity to support continued growth and customer service excellence.

Imperial Distributors serves 3500 supermarkets and other retail stores throughout the Northeastern United States, supplying a wide range of health, beauty and wellness products, general merchandise, seasonal and other non-food grocery items. After a decade of consistent growth, the 77-year old company is moving into an all-new state of the art DC in 2017. Back in 2013, however, the company was facing growth challenges in an aging facility with legacy systems and paper-based processes.

“After several years of double-digit growth, we were running consistently late shifts, pushing dispatches, and starting to have increased quality issues,” said Perry Lundberg, VP of Supply Chain at Imperial. “Our team members were doing everything possible to keep up, but they needed help. Our picking processes and legacy WMS simply weren’t up to the task.”

**“The Lucas software makes us stronger as a company, but it’s also been a tremendous asset to supervisors, managers and hourly associates, helping them do their jobs better.”**

- Perry Lundberg, VP of Supply Chain

## Finding the Right Solution for Managers and Employees

Imperial’s 20-year old JD Edwards WMS from Oracle provides RF-based receiving and inventory control, and although it also provides RF-based picking, the system does not adequately support Imperial’s complex picking requirements. Therefore, picking was performed using stickers and paper lists across more than a dozen different picking zones.

According to Lundberg, “We urgently needed to improve picking productivity and accuracy, and we also wanted to give managers and supervisors access to information they needed to better manage the outbound processes. We had outgrown our current facility and systems, but we needed to make changes immediately. We couldn’t wait to move into a new DC.”

Supply chain and IT managers at Imperial investigated a variety of technology alternatives to modernize their picking processes, including a WMS upgrade. In the end, they selected Lucas Systems and the Lucas Mobile Work Execution System. “We felt that

Lucas was the best fit for our company, and their solution would support our existing facility and evolve with us as we move into a new DC. We also thought that the Lucas voice-directed mobile applications would be easier for our long-time employees.”

The Lucas system at Imperial includes Lucas Engage work execution software that integrates with Imperial’s legacy WMS. Engage creates work assignments, prints labels in some areas, and manages the execution of work across twelve piece and case-picking zones, in addition to driving case picking for replenishment. The Lucas System includes configurable workflows to optimize the wide variety of picking processes at Imperial, including bucket-brigade piece-pick to totes on conveyor, cluster pick to totes on cart, and case-pick to pallet from multi-SKU locations. Engage also provides real-time management dashboards that help supervisors manage work assignments, view individual and group productivity across zones, and address stock-outs and other exceptions as they occur. Managers can access the Engage dashboards on desktop, laptop or tablet computers.

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In addition to work creation and management, Engage orchestrates picking by hourly employees who use Lucas Move voice-directed applications running on standard Zebra Motorola MC3000 mobile computers. Move, featuring Jennifer voice, guides employees through their work, using voice direction, speech recognition, and barcode scanning. The Lucas mobile application also utilizes the device display to make training as easy as possible for hourly associates.

### Rapid Acceptance and Immediate Results

One of the major implementation concerns of Lundberg and managers was employee adoption, as many of the hourly employees at Imperial had been there for 20 or 30 years. “We have lots of dedicated people who have been with us for a while. Some had never used computers, and we knew many were fearful about learning a new technology. We wanted to be sure everyone would be successful making the transition to this new picking system, so we purposely took it slowly.”

Imperial rolled out the Lucas picking process gradually, across zones, and provided ample training and mentorship to bring people along at their own pace. “With Jennifer, Lucas Move was easy to learn, and once people got comfortable with the mobile technology, they took off and none of them would ever want to go back to paper,” says Lundberg.

Within two months of introducing the Lucas system, mis-picks had declined from greater than .1 percent to less than .02 percent, an 80 percent reduction in errors. Likewise, productivity increased 24% in the first full year using the Lucas software, and it has improved an additional 5-6 percent per year since then, for an overall productivity gain of approximately 35% across the entire picking staff.

#### Key Metrics

- » 80% error reduction
- » 35% productivity increase
- » Reduce new employee training by 4+ weeks



Overtime has been reduced and Imperial didn't have to hire any new employees for six months after the Lucas system was introduced, despite attrition. Today, when they do bring on new employees, many of them complete the training and begin working independently in less than two weeks, compared to 6-8 weeks in the past."

**"Our productivity and accuracy gains exceeded our goals, and the people at Lucas justified our trust in them in the first place."**

- Perry Lundberg, VP of Supply Chain



### Supervisors Work Smarter With Engage on Tablets

The improvements in picking accuracy and productivity were expected, but Lucas Engage also provided a tremendous boost in management efficiency that allowed Imperial to phase out line lead positions. In the previous paper-based picking system, line leads in each of the different picking zones served as the eyes and ears of supervisors, monitoring the flow of work and alerting them to any issues. With Engage, supervisors have real-time access to that information on tablet computers they carry out on the floor. Rather than sitting behind a desk, supervisors can walk the floor and still have access to the information they need to manage work, reallocate labor and address issues before they escalate into real problems.

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### Positioned For The Future

Imperial has continued to grow its daily and weekly volumes, and is currently shipping more than 1.2 million pieces per week. To keep pace, they have added staff and are outfitting those new employees with Lucas Move running on ruggedized Android smartphones, freeing up Zebra devices for use in WMS-directed RF applications. In 2015 the company announced plans to move to a new DC in Worcester, which is expected to be fully operational in early 2017. The Lucas Mobile Work Execution Solution is going to move with the rest of the warehouse, but will integrate with new automation systems.

"The new DC will have more automation than our existing facility," says Lundberg, "but our team still needs the Lucas software to ensure they can work as efficiently and accurately as possible. We see Lucas as the ideal complement to our new automation systems, allowing us to get the most out of our experienced workforce as we continue to grow and serve our customers."

### About Lucas Systems, Inc.

Lucas provides solutions for intelligent mobile work execution that transform DC operations. We improve hands-on processes and workflows to help people work smarter and dramatically increase productivity and accuracy.

Beyond our passion for process, Lucas has a unique track-record for customer success that translates into an intensely loyal, committed customer base. We work with single-site DCs and large multi-national distributors and retailers across a wide range of industries. Tens of thousands of users at companies like Cardinal Health, C&S Wholesale Grocers, CVS Health, HD Supply, Office Depot/OfficeMax and Rust-Oleum use Lucas Mobile Work Execution Solutions every day. For more information, visit [www.lucasware.com](http://www.lucasware.com).

