Keller Kitchens

Kitchen manufacturer choses for Pcdata solution

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Keller Kitchen factory used paper order picking lists for thousands of small items for years. A few years ago, the error-prone and inefficient method was replaced by a Pcdata Pick to Light and Pick to Color system. The new system drastically improved Keller's daily operation. Delivery reliability and productivity increased sharply. Additionally, Keller minimalized the inventory differences and staff worked more flexibly.

For more than seventy five years Keller Kitchen focused on the production of quality kitchens for the business market and the consumer market. Every year about 50,000 kitchens are produced. The kitchens find their way in the comprehensive and international dealer network of the company.

The various types of kitchens starts to explain the variety of parts and SKUs involved. From modern kitchens to contemporary kitchens to cottage styles the range of styles provides insight to the nuances and complexity of each kitchen element. Customers may also prefer traditional or farmhouse kitchens; all incorporate design and trends.

The assembly and finishing of the kitchens includes a large number of small parts, such as screws, plugs, caps, and handles. Until recently these so-called haberdashery were collected using a paper picking list. "This was a labor intensive process, which in our view could be more quickly and efficiently," shared Gerard Maanders, head of logistics at Keller Kitchen.

Faster and More Efficient Picking Process

The kitchen manufacturer wanted both a faster and more efficient picking process, as well as improvement and quantifiable increases in delivery reliability. The stock differences had to be reduced further and a new system needed to increase flexible deployment of staff. Together with a project team, Maanders researched several options, including the use of scanners. Most of the parts however, were too small to scan efficiently; approximately 133,000 items per week are picked.

Pcdata's Pick to Light system accomplished the needs and requirements of the Keller Kitchen factory. Helping in the decision-making process was the fact that the sister company, Bruynzeel Kitchens, had good experiences with a Pick to Light system.

Pick to Light Profitability

Maanders, as the head of logistics was convinced of the advantages of Pick-to-Light, and wanted to ensure that the practical solution that was also profitable. Maanders discovered, "The Pcdata Pick to Light solution was most stable and recognizable for our employees. Pcdata supported us to get the case profitable."

Keller decided to use a Pick to Light system for their fast moving items and to do the picking of the B- and C- articles with Pick-to-Color. Components that are being picked five times a day or more often, are stored in the Pick to Light area. These fast movers range about 80 SKU's. The other articles are on the other side of the aisle, in colored boxes, collected according to the Pick to Color principle. In this case one light per five storage locations is sufficient. If an article has to be picked from a certain bin, the light in the color of the corresponding bin lights. By collecting the B- and C- articles according to the Pick to Color principle; less lights are needed and the control investment is much lower.

Picking area

Late in 2011 Keller Kitchen switched to the new system, supplied and implemented by Pcdata. In the former haberdashery warehouse a picking area was placed where the necessary parts were collected according to the Pick to Light and Pick to Color principles. The required data are retrieved from the ERP system of the kitchen manufacturer, after that the system fulfills a volume calculation and determines how many and which type of boxes are required for the orders. The number of boxes per order is always minimal, the boxes are as small as possible and the weight per box is never over 10 pounds.

Then the parts are picked on the basis of the route sequence. The shipping label, printed automatically by the system, is scanned after which the displays in the first zone light up. Parallel to lighting up the displays in the first zone, the first zone of the Pick to Color system is activated immediately. Fast movers and slow movers are collected simultaneously. As soon as all orders in a zone are picked, the order box is transported on a roller conveyor to the next zone, where the picking process is continued.

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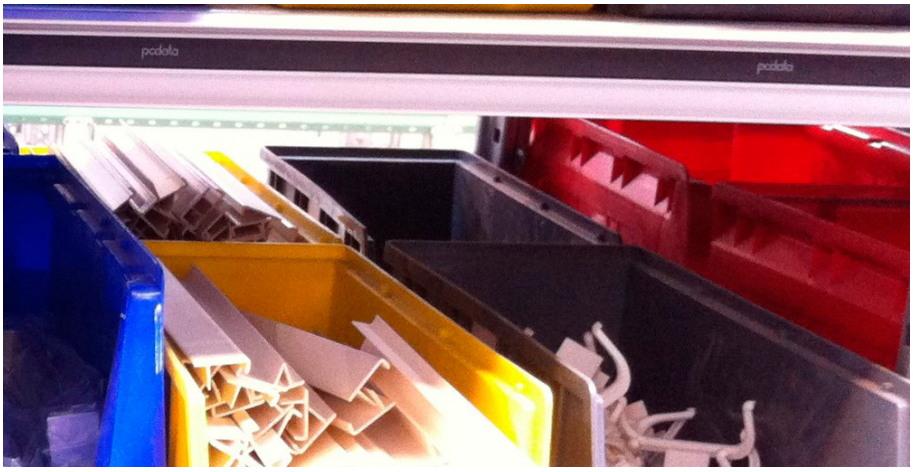

Picking Accuracy Nearing 100%

The system has been operational and running problem-free for more than two years and the goals were achieved. The delivery reliability increased according to plan. Samples showed that, prior to the system being installed, on every 2,500 picks about 50 picking mistakes were made; an error rate of two percent. Maanders commented, “Apart from the sales value, this did not benefit our reputation. There are backorders, and so extra work needed, customer satisfaction suffers from those errors.” With the commissioning of the Pick to Light system, Keller targeted an accuracy of 99% on picked orders. That goal is amply met; the picking accuracy was even close to 100%.

Maanders praised Pcdata noting that, “The improvement in productivity amounts to about 20 percent. There are no more pick lists printed and distributed. In other words, there is less red tape. The necessary information is now entered in the system once, after which the required stickers and packing slips are printed. We can perform the same work more reliable and more efficiently with fewer people.”

Flexible Deployment of Staff Due to Pick to Light

The third objective, the flexible deployment of staff, was also achieved. The Pick to Light system is intuitive and easy to learn. New people are incorporated within half an hour. As a result, Keller also rotates its employees. Possible capacity constraints are then easier to absorb and the manufacturer is able to offer its employees more variety in work. To adjust the connecting logistic processes, Keller succeeded to minimize the inventory differences. In the old situation the picking stock was replenished once empty. Now they have chosen for a picking bin and a buffer bin, which is placed behind the picking stock. There is always at least one day stock available at the picking locations.

By simply replacing the empty bin for full bins, the stocks are supplemented. To prevent error, the bins are equipped with item numbers, barcodes and where possible photos at the back. Articles that are very similar are logically not together.

Maanders stated the bottom-line impact of the Pcdata Pick to Light solution: “We can run the same job more reliably and efficiently with fewer people.”

The company

Name: Keller Kitchens

Activity: design and production of kitchens

Location: Roosendaal, Netherlands

Warehouse: ± 6.200 m2

Employees: ± 250

Pick-to-light system

Name: Distrib Pick to Light

Number of picking locations: 310

Number of picks a week: ± 133.000

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