



ASAP Automation Customer Success Story - Central Power Systems

Synopsis

Customer Profile

- A private company, founded 1985
- Distributor of small engines, service parts, and outdoor power equipment.
- Supports both OEM and aftermarket parts lines
- Supports a network of over 6,000 registered service dealers in the Midwest, Florida and the Bahamas

Size of Facility

- ~ 140,000 ft²

Demand

- Highly seasonal order profile

Solution

- Advanced Warehouse Control System w/ HMI
- Exacta® Acculight™ Pick-to-Light
- Batch Order Processing

Benefits

- Higher Throughput
- Greater Accuracy
- Enhanced Product Visibility

“We believe that this investment will insure superior service to our customers for many years to come.” – Michael Finn, President of Central Power Systems.

Faced with a lack of space in their current facility, Central Power Systems used an opportunity for expansion to update their new facility with state-of-the-art picking technology. ASAP Automation helped design and implement a system that provides excellent order picking accuracy, growth potential, and redundancy with other distribution facilities.

Central Power Systems

Central Power Systems, a privately held company, was founded in 1985 in Columbus, OH and distributes small engines, service parts and outdoor power equipment through a network of 6000 registered service dealers throughout the Midwest, Florida and the Bahamas. Bastian Material Handling originally partnered with Central Power back in 1999, providing them with a conveyor-based tote routing system. To direct the totes to picking areas, small reflective tabs were positioned at different points on the tote, relating to different zones.

Towards the end of 2006, Central Power was running out of room in their current facility and began looking for a new warehouse to better accommodate their current and future growth. In August 2007, ASAP Automation and BMH were selected to provide the new material handling system which included a new conveyor system, a barcode-based control system for routing totes, list picking, and Pick-to-Light. The Exacta system serves as a transactional processor, directing the picking and tote routing while Central Power's legacy host system handles the WMS functions, pack and manifest. The ASAP team worked closely with the host system to come to their interface specifications to help minimize costly changes to the legacy application.

System Detail

Central Power's host system continues to print the pick tickets (which also have invoice information on them) and downloads the order information into Exacta. An operator manually associates these tickets with a tote at the Association station. This process gives the operator control over how many orders are active in the system at any given time and can help throttle the induction of new orders to keep the line busy, but not overloaded. Totes are then diverted to the appropriate zones to be picked.

The first three picking zones are processed with Exacta List paper-based picking. Operators select up to six (6) totes and place them on a specially-designed cart to be picked as a batch. Exacta prints the batch pick list, showing picks for the batch in location-sequence to efficiently direct the operator in a serpentine pattern through the shelving. Items are slotted in the pick zone to help keep the picker's walking path to a minimum.



The following three zones are comprised of carton flow rack and fitted with Exacta's Acculight™ Pick-to-Light system. Pick-to-Light is a very fast and accurate way to pick products, and so these racks are home to Central Power's fastest moving parts. The Central Power team had not originally planned for a light-directed picking system, but the option proved to be a valuable and cost-effective addition to the system. The Pick-to-Light area was designed to support 3-5 operators to flex with different order volume loads.



Once all of the picks for a tote have been completed, Exacta's Warehouse Control System (WCS) routes the totes to appropriate pack lanes. If there are products for the order that are too large to fit into a tote, they are picked from bulk rack and floor storage and manually consolidated with the totes in the packing area. These off-line picks are handled using Exacta's List and Label Set picking methods. The labels help direct the operator to the proper picking location and also serve as an easy-to-read identifier for the products when it is time to consolidate.

Smooth Transition

After being awarded the project, ASAP and their partners worked with Central Power Systems to relocate hardware and products from Central Power's existing facilities into the new warehouse. The excellent communication between team members and a solid testing plan before implementation ensured that the several day backlog of orders resulting from the move were processed quickly, allowing Central Power to catch up in only a few days. Central Power's sales force have also seen the benefits, calling 2008's transition into the spring sales increase one of the smoothest in recent memory.



Room to Grow

Central Power's new building is much larger than their old facility and still has room to allow expansion of the new material handling system and material storage areas. The new material handling and controls system was designed to handle an aggressive volume increase over the next several years and has already proven to be much more efficient than Central Power's previous system. The Pick-to-Light area was purposefully located at the end of the main conveyor loop to provide easy expansion as Central Power's business continues to grow.



Michael Finn, president of Central Power, had this to say about the move to their new facility; "We invested several million dollars in our new facility for the sole reason of serving our customers. It's a beautiful place with lots of advanced systems. Our customers depend on us to get their orders shipped the same day without errors or damage. We believe that this investment will insure superior service to our customers for many years to come." (PowerPress, April 2008).