# RF – to Scan or not to Scan

Using bar code scanning in your warehouse management system will lead to greater efficiency. Read this paper and learn how implementing this cost-effective technology will help you save time and increase the visibility of your supply chain processes.

*Scanning barcodes and using mobile computers is not only about speeding up your workers, it's about task efficiency.*

Don't look to scanning to make picking faster, or increase your lifts per hour for putaways – look for the benefits that flow from doing it right the first time. Scanning will actually add time to the tasks, the time to grasp the device, aim, shoot the barcode(s) and get a confirmation of the scan. It's after the scan that the benefits start to flow. Now the right product is in the right place, your inventory is accurate and your transaction is visible to your CSR's and supervisors.

Information is the real payback, the right information to the right person, at the right time. Accurate inventory has a huge payback, both in labor and service. No more walking the floor to find that misplaced pallet, no more mispicks requiring materials to be returned and frustrated customers. How much time do your supervisors spend locating 'missing' product?

How many times do frustrated customers vent their anger to your CSR's or you for incomplete or wrong orders? How much labor is consumed checking, then rechecking orders before shipment just to ensure the right product is going to the right place?

Some tasks simply do not justify using this technology. Where product selectivity is not critical and no use by dating or FIFO requirements exist; where product is easily differentiated to ensure correct product selection and where activity levels are very low the cost benefit is reduced, sometimes to the point where paper-based operations make more sense. Where a short term contract is a one-off and margins don't support a required complex process paper is preferred.

Implementing a scanning solution is not cheap, but it is inexpensive. In determining a ROI you must look beyond the direct costs to the real savings, the removal of waste labor, the increased customer satisfaction, the competitive advantage it provides with prospective customers. Those are where the real benefits are provided.

Once you have made the decision to implement a mobility solution you need to decide what works best for your environment: Batch or Real Time (connected) solutions each have their own benefits and shortcomings.

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Batch solutions do not need the infrastructure to connect to the system and are ideal for situations where providing that infrastructure is either cost prohibitive or not necessary. Tasks are uploaded to the device and downloaded on completion. You may have a temporary storage facility or a short term contract; maybe you are receiving away from your building at a port or rail yard. Perhaps the environment you are working in is not conducive to maintaining connectivity. Under these conditions a batch solution is preferred.

Connected mode solutions are required where real time information is required. This connectivity can be provided via a wireless network or from cell phone network access.

The key to gaining the benefits of mobility is to ensure you have the correct hardware, configured to perform the correct tasks. Cheap hardware is increasingly becoming available but look to your own environment and processes to determine if cheap is inexpensive. Rugged devices produced by a company like Psion Teklogix, or other manufacturers with a focus on your needs and a commitment to service, will cost a little more but provide rapid payback in reliability and will be much lower when looking at lifecycle costs. Your WMS must support both paper and RF based processes. Peak demands can be met using paper in concert with available scanning equipment and good disaster recovery principles dictate that options must be available should connectivity be lost or devices lost or damaged.

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