case study

Plant Access Grows Its Competitive Edge: Industry-First RFID

Bunnings Plant Provider Achieves 100% Track and Trace Accuracy

Plant Access is a specialised logistics services provider, catering to the green life industry. Plant Access provides a highly efficient service utilising a unique, innovative steel stillage design used to pick, cross-dock and deliver nursery plants to Bunnings Warehouse locations across Victoria and South Australia.

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Weeding out manual processes

Plant Access manages the orders and provides the steel stillages that are used to transport plant products from over 67 nursery supplier sites to Bunnings stores across Victoria and South Australia. Shipments from different suppliers are consolidated at the Plant Access cross dock facility before orders are transported to Bunnings locations and plants are sold to consumers direct out of the steel stillages.

At any one time, Plant Access has thousands of re-usable steel stillages spread across hundreds of sites throughout the supply chain. Knowing the location of all these stillages and the status of orders was a serious challenge for Plant Access under a legacy paper-based manual ordering system.

A new automated tracking system was necessary to capture real-time data from nursery supplier sites, the Plant Access cross dock logistics facility and the Bunnings stores, in order for Plant Access to have accurate and instant visibility to their stillage assets and the products they were transporting.

Building a flourishing future with RFID

"Plant Access commissioned us to design and pilot an automated system to track the tailor-made steel stillages, which would allow real time visibility of customer orders across the supply chain," said Geoffrey Ramadan, Managing Director, Unique Micro Design (UMD). "Following successful testing of Honeywell Scanning & Mobility RFID technology, Plant Access decided to roll out a pilot automated track and trace system supported by our cloud network enabling real time information to be accessible from multiple locations."

Honeywell IT75 ruggedised metal-mount UHF RFID tags are now attached to the specially designed stillages so when scanned and processed at key intervals in the supply chain they feed real time track and trace information to the Plant Access cloud. The pilot system allows supplier nurseries to pull down orders from the Plant Access cloud for data capture by workers on RFID-enabled Honeywell CN70 rugged mobile terminals. The handheld computers are used in the nursery to pick and pack orders, scan the RFID tags on packed stillages and finally register the order as packed on the cloud so Plant Access is notified that the order is ready for pick-up and transportation.

The RFID portal at Plant Access's cross dock is fitted with Honeywell IF61 and IF2 industrial readers to capture the RFID tags on the stillages as trucks pass through the entry or exit portal. When RFID tags are read by the portal, it automatically sends real time track and trace information to the Plant Access cloud with no manual inventory and counting. Trucks of various sizes are loaded with up to 100 stillages with the portal reading up to 40 tags per second. The RFID tags are applied on carefully selected locations on the stillages to achieve a 100% read rate by the portal when trucks are passing through fully loaded.

The grass is greener on the other side for Plant Access and their customers and suppliers

The major benefit of the new Plant Access pilot system is improved visibility into where stillages are located – ranging from those that are new (yet to be picked and packed), nursery-fulfilled (picked and packed at the supplier), arrived at the cross dock (read at the entry portal), exited cross dock (read at the exit portal) or delivered (when the customer reports that the order has arrived). Real time updates were successfully achieved for orders both leaving the supplier sites and arriving at the Plant Access cross dock.

"The Plant Access upgrade pilot project has succeeded in capturing asset location data in real time at critical points in the supply chain," said Richard Smithells, Business Development, Plant Access. "Both Plant Access and our customers stand to benefit from the improved visibility the Honeywell Scanning & Mobility RFID tracking system can offer."

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The real time notification offered by the UMD and Honeywell Scanning & Mobility RFID solution is helping Plant Access to maximise resource allocation, including scheduling the right truck size for order deliveries, planning out route usage and reducing lost or misplaced stillages. Real-time information also allows Plant Access to immediately detect any items being sent in the wrong consignment when trucks are exiting the cross dock, which prevents costly delivery mistakes and unnecessary time wasted later remediating the order.

Customer service has been boosted for Bunnings, who are now able to quickly look up their order on the web portal to track what is being delivered so that once it is received they can cross check that all items are correct and mark it off as successfully delivered to aid proof of delivery.

At the Plant Access cross dock, the time and labour intensive task of manually inputting data when an order arrives has been significantly reduced and errors have been eliminated under the new automated system. The RFID application has also brought improvements to nursery suppliers such as saving paper by displaying orders on the handheld device rather than printing them on paper.

"I am thrilled that Plant Access chose Honeywell Scanning & Mobility RFID technology for this green life industry-first track and trace application," said Tony Repaci, country manager, ANZ, for Honeywell Scanning & Mobility. "The RFID solution is delivering excellent business value and a competitive differentiator for Plant Access through 100% accuracy in automatic identification of each specific asset."

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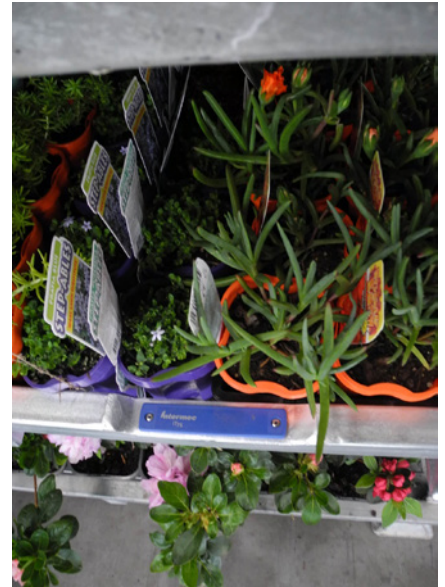
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