

Bass Pro Shops



At a glance

Industry: Retail

Applications: Warehouse,
Merchandise Management

A unique retailing adventure; An innovative RF solution

Bass Pro Shops stores are more than a place to shop; they're a retail adventure. Stepping inside a store feels like you're entering an amazing outdoor environment.

When John L. Morris started Bass Pro in 1971, he brought his passion for bass fishing, conservation, and the great outdoors and turned it into a successful enterprise. Bass Pro's 300,000 square-foot flagship *Outdoor World* store in Springfield, Missouri – "The Granddaddy of All Outdoor Stores" – is the number one tourist attraction in the state. The store houses a museum dedicated to the outdoors as well as trout pools, a firing range, three restaurants, and a 40,000 square-foot boat and RV showroom.

So how do you manage the merchandise for a store like that plus ten other retail locations spread over nearly half the United States, as well as a booming catalog and Web business? With wireless technology from Intermec.

Wireless Distribution Center

Bass Pro runs a million-square-foot distribution center in Springfield through which all their merchandise flows. To manage every aspect of merchandise movement, Bass Pro employs two hundred Intermec wireless handheld computers

using Intermec wireless LAN access points throughout the distribution center. Intermec handhelds and access points also are used in every *Outdoor World* retail store.

Bass Pro's operations evolved from a 100% manual, paper-based system in their old facility to wireless data collection when they moved into their new distribution center in 1992. The old system required workers to write on paper the item number, the shelf they took the item from, and where it was going. At the end of the day, the information was keypunched into the system. Not only did this create several points where errors could occur, but Bass Pro could never be 100% sure what they had in the warehouse during the day.

Now, with the Intermec wireless system, Bass Pro can track every piece of merchandise in real time. Their tens-of-thousands of SKUs are logged into the warehouse management system when they arrive and are tracked throughout the warehouse as they're put away, picked, placed in totes, and moved onto trucks for delivery to the stores.

Distribution Center Workflow

Intermec handhelds give workers instructions on what to pick and where each item goes. Managers can also

track the productivity of the DC workers with the data from the handhelds – and productivity is definitely up. The entire system is dependent on high-speed wireless networking – which the Intermec system delivers.

“With tens of thousands of transactions recorded every day, our wireless network has to be fast,” said Rob Harris, Director of Application Development for Bass Pro. “Intermec’s 2.4GHz access points are a critical part of the success of the RF system.”

While workers can track goods at the pallet and box level, totes are the basic unit at the distribution center. They use the plastic totes to consolidate items for shipment to stores, or in the case of mail, dealer, and Web orders, one tote is used per shipment. Each tote has its own unique bar code tag and every item in the tote is associated with it by a simple scan of the tags.

As goods move along every step of the way in the DC, their tags are scanned to associate them by where they came from (shelf tags), what they are (tote tags), and what store or truck they’re heading for.

After the totes or boxes are filled, they are placed on the conveyors. As the totes move along the line, fixed-position scanners above the line read their bar codes and the totes are automatically directed to the appropriate trailer for the store. The fixed-position scanners also do the same for mail, dealer, and Web orders, directing packages to the trailer of one of the eight carriers used to deliver them.

Just In Time Tagging

One significant area of improvement has been in tagging soft goods before going to the stores. Under the previous system, tags for the entire day were printed in the morning and would travel with

the paperwork until they were applied. Many tags were damaged or lost along the way and needed to be reprinted. Sometimes more tags were printed than there were goods on the shelf.

Now Bass Pro tags items as the last step before they head to the truck. As totes and boxes come down the line, the supervisor scans the bar code and enters the line number into his handheld. This information is sent to one of four tag printers at two stations.

The tote’s tag identifies its contents and, from the data entered by the buyer, the system knows what kind of tags to print for each item. The labels are printed and automatically sorted by the line number and the tote, so workers can efficiently tag the items and send them on their way. By generating the labels at the last possible moment, Bass Pro has eliminated errors, damaged labels, and over-prints.

Retail Merchandise Management

In the store, Intermec handhelds are the key tool for merchandise management, allowing store managers to conduct sophisticated inventory and sales analysis on the spot. Merchandising specialists can check prices, item sales volumes, inventory levels at the store, or locate items not in the store.

The retail store wireless environment was converted from UHF to spread spectrum in the spring of 1997. Before the conversion, all PC applications, including cycle counts, were performed in a batch environment, accessing a database located on a PC in the store. The store database had to be kept in synch with the master database in the Merchandise Management System on a nightly basis. When the stores converted to a spread spectrum environment, their applications were converted to host applications, which the Intermec handhelds

access via 5250 Telnet sessions. This allows for real-time data access, much preferred over data updated once a day. Not only did it streamline store operations, it opened the door for new application development.

For example, they can check an item on an end cap or display to see its sales volume. If it isn’t selling well, they might decide to move it back and bring up a better selling item or to work this item harder.

Store Associates use their Intermec handhelds to collect product information to build a Store-to-Distribution Center or a Store-to-Store transfer batch via barcode scanning and quantity data entry in the storeroom. This procedure used to be completely manual, writing down the product number and quantity on a tablet and then going to a hardwired device to key the information in a data entry session of the transfer creation application. Some product cannot be returned to the Distribution Center and with the old manual system this information was not known until the data entry session. This meant an Associate had to sort through the product to find what could not be transferred and remove it from the pallet. With the wireless handheld data collection, this valuable information is immediately displayed to the Associate who can remove it from the pallet, saving valuable time for the storeroom Associate.

Associates can also produce “peg” (or shelf) labels and hang tags by ordering them via their handheld. The order is sent over the wireless network to printers in the storeroom area. The system ensures customers have the best shopping experience possible by providing the right merchandise – and product information – at the right time.

In retail, managing merchandise efficiently is the critical factor in a store’s success. Intermec’s wireless handheld computers and networks enable Bass Pro to have complete visibility into its merchandising every step of the way – and helps them manage their expansion into new stores and markets.

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