



INNOVATING STORAGE & RETRIEVAL

American Family Life Assurance Company

Performance Report

Challenge:

60,000 sq.ft. literature distribution facility was being relocated to a 10,000 sq.ft. facility.

Solution:

Five White horizontal carousels with software.

Result:

Five White horizontal carousels help distribute almost 4000 different items. Pick rate increased from 500 lines per picker/week to 2500.

“We went from a three-day backlog to same-day shipping.”



Five horizontal carousels from White help distribute almost 4000 different items. Pick rate increased from 500 times per picker/week to 2500.

*The 60,000 square foot literature distribution facility of **The American Family Life Assurance Company (AFLAC)** in Columbus, Georgia was being relocated to a remodeled, but much smaller, 10,000 square foot facility. AFLAC stocks thousands of different forms, booklets, calendars and promotional premiums and sends them out to its 14,000 associates (agents) in 4 states. When making the move, the AFLAC staff was concerned with more than just consolidating space. They wanted a system that would provide same-day shipping, increase picking*

Man hours reduced two-thirds

A system using five horizontal carousels from White Systems, Inc was developed and installed at AFLAC.

It has reduced manpower input by as much as two-thirds and has increased operator productivity by 300% to 400%.

Before the White carousels were installed, items had been spread over a large area. AFLAC had been picking about 3000 lines per week using six people. Now, two people in an efficient, compact area are picking close to 5000 lines. “We went from a three-day backlog to same-day shipping,” says Diane Bland, AFLAC’s manager of supply services.

Choosing the property equipment, according to Ms. Bland, was a necessity since the move to the smaller facility had to be made without reducing inventory. In fact, the inventory has since increased from 3300 items stocked to nearly 4000.

Ideal for forms

After analysis of the company available space,

the White representative recommended a horizontal carousel system because it offers attributes of speed and organization that makes it ideal for firms distributing large volumes of different types of printed forms.

Each carousel is equipped with 70 bins, 24 1/2 inches wide and 16 inches deep. There are eight shelves per bin and each shelf holds two boxes of forms in the original shipping carton. The system can hold up to 5600 items.

Orders, which average about six lines, are entered into the host computer, then output at a printer located near the carousels. Each order printout shows every item’s location by carousel, bin and shelf. It also lists quantity, form number and description. All order items are keyed into a control keyboard at the carousels before the picking begins. The keyboard can queue up to 250 locations.

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The system uses a “pick and pass” concept. The carousels are set up in two zones, each with its own operator. At the first zone, the operator selects the items located in the zone’s three carousels. As the operator picks from one carousel, another is moving, bringing bins with the next items to be picked to the operator. Waiting time is virtually eliminated.

The tote with the partially completed order is then passed to the second zone, where the operator picks the rest of the order from the zone’s two carousels. The completed tote is pushed onto a conveyor to packing and shipping.

Picking speed is further increased because the operator doesn’t have to count. Most items are shrink-wrapped in standard quantities and can only be ordered that way. Other items are weighed to determine quantity. Two packers, nearby, pack the items and affix the shipping labels. The system produces an order, ready to go, approximately every three minutes.

Each morning, before the picking routine begins, the carousels are restocked. This takes about an hour. The inventories are taken from a storeroom that holds bulk quantities received from forms printers and similar sources. Picking is performed for a full eight hours.

The engineering staff at White tailored the system’s design to complete the building’s configuration.

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Each item’s location is printed on the order by the host computer and is then keyboarded into the carousel system. The carousels then bring the items to the picker. No walk or search.



The time from when an order is printed out to when it is ready to ship can be less than ten minutes.

The carousels extend from beneath an office mezzanine and were built around several building columns to maximize floor space utilization. AFLAC’s potential future needs were also considered. Eventually, the system will be entirely computer controlled with order and item location information fed directly into the carousel system. This should further increase picking speed and accuracy. More carousel units can be added to the system to expand its capacity and shelving arrangements can be easily modified.

Since the White carousels were installed, the room which houses them has become a “must see” for visiting associates touring the AFLAC facilities.

“The system is fool proof,” observes Ms. Bland. “We haven’t had a day of downtime.” However, she added that the bottom line “is the service it has allowed us to provide our associates across the country.”

A roller conveyor accepts totes with completed orders, transporting them to a nearby packing and shipping area. Labels are generated with the order.



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