Lydia™ VOICE

WINNING THE STAFF VOTE

How LYDIA™ Voice added a refreshing glow to picking operations at a fast-growing personal hygiene retailer

Normal

EPG | Ehrhardt Partner Group

Smarter Connected Logistics™

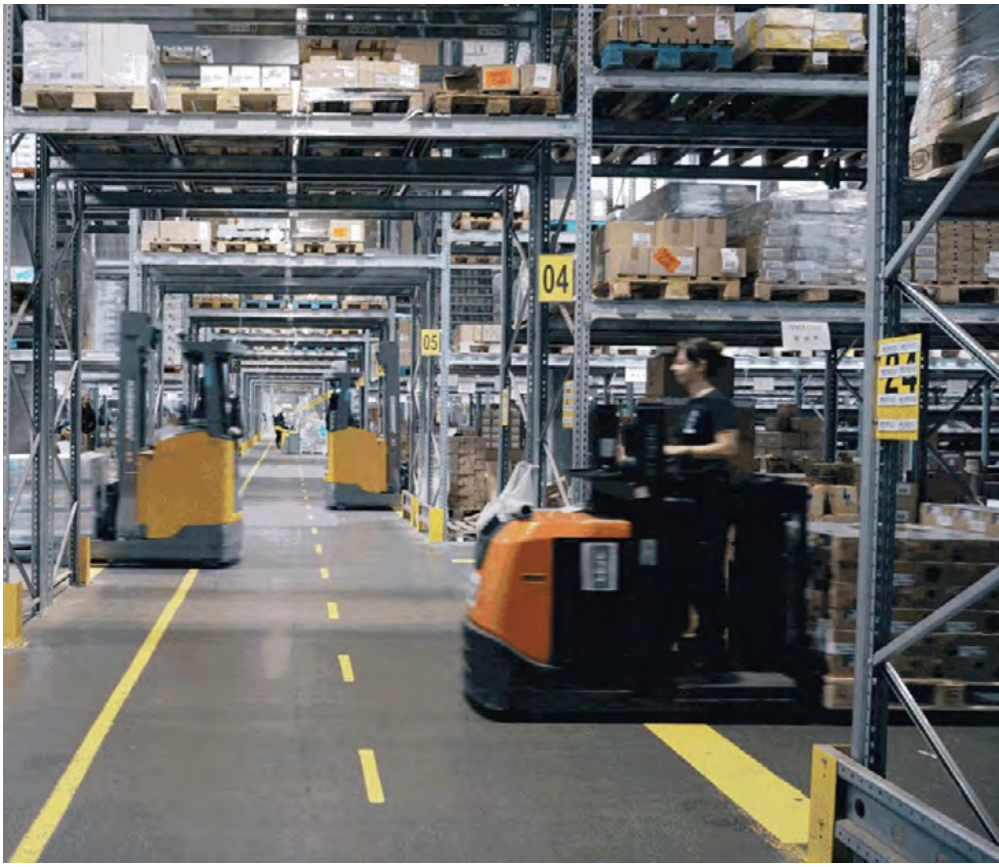
Flexibility is vital to all modern logistics operations, especially if you're a retailer expanding at lightning speed and needing logistics processes to grow fast with you. When hard-working employees give your chosen systems a firm thumbs-up, you know you're on to a winner.

NORMAL is a Denmark-based personal care retailer founded in 2013. Its colourful and distinctive shop layouts, which adopt the Ikea fixed 'walk-through' model, have made it a go-to store for hair, body and skin care, deodorant, shaving, personal hygiene and cosmetics products and the company is now in six countries from the Nordics to the Netherlands and France. With between one and five shops now opening every week, it is "inexpensive and adventurous to shop branded everyday products", and the store total is now over 350 and counting. Something is clearly working.

It goes without saying that when a retailer is mushrooming, that means demands, challenges and, above all, opportunities for that retailer's warehouse logistics operations. In NORMAL's case, facilities had grown from the basement of the first store in Silkeborg, in Denmark's Jutland region, to a 37,000 square-metre warehouse at Horsens in just five years.

An out-of-the-box WMS was deployed during this period to facilitate growing demands. The downside was that picking operations needed an overhaul. Picking numbers were high and workers were keeping up with the pace, but quality had suffered a dip, with mispick figures creeping up.

A further concern was the hand scanner system in use, which required the picker always to put the device down in order to pick the goods. In those circumstances, it's very easy for a well-intentioned picker to lose focus on the correct storage location, having scanned it correctly, but then to pick from the wrong location. It was an issue that they needed the new technology to address.



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Mette Margrethe Poulsen,
Logistics Development Manager at NORMAL

DIGITAL FUTURE
WITH VOICE

Enter Mette Margrethe Poulsen and her team in summer 2018. As Logistics Development Manager, her brief was to overhaul and optimise picking operations as part of a broader logistics digitalisation and modernisation program. It was already becoming clear that the existing Horsens warehouse was going to be too small for future needs and this would be an important factor in the team's thinking. A brand-new replacement building 20 km from the current site, boosting the footprint to 60,000 square metres and the height from 6 metres to 12 metres, is due to open by early 2023.

"We looked at where we could develop and improve systems, both in terms of updating the IT solution to better suit the needs of the business, but also the hardware," she recalls. "Using voice-picking technology gave us a clear opportunity to grow the business."

Other non-voice picking technologies were explored by the team but Voice was the clear preference. "My colleagues and I had worked with Voice before and we didn't see any technology that was better or more evolved – pick-by-vision was not mature enough yet, for instance, so we decided that Voice was a good solution for us."

The first step was to select the right voice solution from the wider market for the business. "Our WMS supplier was already partnered with another Voice supplier, but we wanted to evaluate the best solution for us based on our needs," she explains.

EPG SOLUTIONS
IN ACTION

The team's first meeting with Ehrhardt Partner Group (EPG) to discuss its LYDIA Voice solution took place in the autumn of 2019. Mette was already familiar with the system having worked successfully with the German-based supply chain software and technology provider on a project for another company, but she had not so far had the opportunity to see the Voice solution in practice with the legacy WMS her team had inherited at Horsens.

"It was very important to us to see the solution working in real life," she recalls. "So we visited a large international retailer in Switzerland with the EPG team to see it working at scale with an existing customer." After this successful trip, it was clear that the final winner would be chosen from two different competitors. The NORMAL team now moved to an important second step in the process: their employees. Company culture is a very important piece in the NORMAL jigsaw. "We want all employees to succeed, to feel like they are a real part of things," explains Mette. "If they don't match up with us, they won't stay, so it's vital to all of us that everyone buys into the same values."

It's made for an entrepreneurial culture in which a lot of strong development ideas have come from the warehouse floor. Staff are competitive with each other, too. "We wanted to employ the system that they wanted," she explains.

Mette Margrethe Poulsen
Logistics Development Manager, NORMAL

"The hardware spoke for itself. It was way more innovative than what we saw from the competitor."

Mette Margrethe Poulsen

FAVOURED
EMPLOYEE CHOICE

So it was a big question: what did their employees think of the new kit they were going to be asked to use every day?

This was where LYDIA's unique picking vest, in which all electronics are integrated and headphones are not required, added something extra according to the NORMAL employees. "The LYDIA VoiceWear was hands-down the preferred solution from our employees," confirms Mette. "We carried out a test in which they wore the vests and tried out headsets, performing picking tests in a live simulation with each. The employees were given a free vote to pick their favourite."

The vote was a clear win for LYDIA. Many staff had worked with another voice system before and had found headphones restrictive and uncomfortable. With LYDIA VoiceWear, they were freed from 'the bubble', able to communicate with their fellow employees as they went about their daily tasks. "The hardware spoke for itself," she reports. "It was way more innovative than what we saw from the competitor."

LYDIA also swept away in an instant the picking problems at NORMAL caused by using a hand scanner. With LYDIA, there are no breaks in the workflow; the employee has the benefit of hands-free and eyes-free picking which means he or she is better able to focus on the correct location without distraction.

A key point for NORMAL was that EPG had listened to users to improve its product and this fitted like a glove with the ethos at Horsens. "If you don't listen to the users, you won't innovate, you'll stick to the default," she argues. "At NORMAL, we don't like defaults! We like companies that challenge the status quo, who stray from the straight and narrow. So we felt that EPG's values very much matched our own."

NO TRAINING **NEEDED**

Another clear win for LYDIA over the competition came from its ease of use, requiring no training for new staff. This is an often underestimated factor, as warehouse staff are subject to high turnover, particularly at seasonal peaks. “You don’t have to do voice training, you can just start talking to LYDIA and she will understand you,” says Mette. “It is very easy for new users to get started.”

This is a noteworthy departure from the competition, she adds. “The competitor product requires some time spent repeating words and this can cause delays and perhaps some frustration for managers and new staff. The LYDIA Voice system does not add any complexity, you don’t have to do anything extra.”

PICKING DISCREPANCIES **REDUCED**

The decision to deploy with EPG finally made with some ease, the next step was implementation. NORMAL started with five staff in live testing and rolled out gradually. This was all done remotely, due to Covid restrictions, but was carried out smoothly and without fuss. Whether dealing directly with the customer, as was the case with NORMAL, or via trained and certified solution partners, EPG always aspires to maintain a close, partnership-based relationship with its customers. It was therefore important not to let pandemic distance obscure the focus and strength of that bond. “The remote testing went far better than we hoped,” says Mette. “All minor issues requiring attention were dealt with smoothly and quickly, as if the EPG team was on site with us. The EPG technical guys took on a lot of responsibility outside the norm to make the project a success and that was very appealing to us.”

The NORMAL team is delighted with the new picking system and the reduction in the number of picking discrepancies since its implementation. Looking to the future, the new warehouse will see the number of LYDIA devices rise from the current 60 to over 400 concurrent users in the warehouse. The EPG solution is so vital to future operations that any new WMS bought to replace the existing out-of-the-box model will be required to integrate with LYDIA Voice as a given.

Meanwhile, it looks like fast-growing NORMAL is set for a long-term relationship with EPG. Mette laughs: “They are like family, even if the family you only see at large family gatherings! What we like is that they are all really competent professionals, but as our managing director says, it’s also very important you can have a beer with them on a Friday!”

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www.lydia-voice.com