

Pick-to-Voice or Voice Picking?

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Voice picking or pick-to-voice?

When it comes to adding voice to warehouse picking processes, we often hear slightly different terminology. Is Pick to Voice different than Voice Picking? At their core, both refer to the technology of using voice to automate order picking in the warehouse. The goal is to use voice to help speed the product fulfillment process.

While these two terms have similar meanings, voice technology has changed since the phrase “pick-to-voice” was popularized. Using voice automation in the warehouse has evolved to be applicable to many other workflows, with picking just one of many applications that can be voice enabled today. While both terms refer to using a paperless, hands-free, eyes-free, voice-directed system, I prefer to use voice picking or voice-directed picking to refer to modern, workflow-centered systems available today.

Which processes in the warehouse are ideal for voice automation?

Any process that is part of product fulfillment in the warehouse can be voice automated. Processes inside and outside the four walls are all candidates for optimized voice directed productivity. A voice picking system is typically used to improve a picking workflow that integrates with the warehouse management system (WMS).

While voice activated order picking is generic terminology, diving deeper we find the picking processes that each company implements have been optimized for their products in their supply chain. For instance, the picking processes might include each picking, case picking, zone picking, directed picking, pick-n-pack. In addition to a variety of order picking methodologies – all of which can be supported with modern voice picking software – additional applications are ideal for voice automated workflows. Replenishment, cycle count, receiving, audit receiving, bin consolidation, pallet consolidation are examples of related process in the distribution center that benefit from hands-free, eyes-free, mobile workflow automation using voice.

In your experience, what surprises customers most often about the AccuSpeechMobile solution?

The ease of deployment and that we do not require each user to be voice trained before using our voice automated workflow solution. I’m going to say it again for clarity, “No Voice Training Needed!”.

Deployment is a very important concern for customers. Our solution meets agile deployment requirements because the team on the warehouse or shop floor, already know the existing process. The workflows remain the same, just voice automated. We're not changing how they're used to working. We remove extraneous steps from existing processes – often steps that experienced employees find tedious, repetitive and time consuming; we remove these repetitive steps – but the overall workflow remains familiar, so the learning curve is very short. Give them an hour and they know how to use the voice directed order process, following the workflow from the WMS/ERP system and integrating with the warehouse scanners.

Another feature our customers find extremely helpful is the staged deployment for our solution. Since our voice directed workflow solution is installed entirely on the mobile device (no voice server or middleware), our customers can deploy it to their users in stages. This might mean rolling it out to one or two employees on the floor first. With this limited testing, refinements are made and then it's easy to test again or to widen the deployment scope. One person or five people at a time can be deployed. There is no cut and swap with our solution – no huge planned cutover is needed. This reduces user and management anxiety and insures a successful implementation. Operations professionals appreciate that they can deploy a process enhancement, such as voice directed picking, without interrupting crucial production workflows.

A big benefit our clients are usually surprised by is the short deployment time for our solution. An 8-12-week deployment time is a typical deployment for us; the AccuSpeechMobile solution is so easy to test and deploy, rapidly incorporating feedback and changes and retesting... all on the mobile device. This allows us to work closely with the team on the floor to meet their needs.

When we say 8-12 weeks, we really mean it. The clock starts when you sign the contract with us to the day the solution is deployed in production. This is one of the most exciting things our customers discover when working with us to voice automate processes in the distribution center. They are always pleasantly surprised.

Of-course the most important result of using the AccuSpeechMobile voice solution are the results our customers achieve. Double-digit productivity gains are the norm. Error reduction to 99.99%, which is especially important for online orders. ROI is almost always less than a year. It is wonderful to see the tangible, measurable benefits that are realized after implementing voice automated workflows. We're very proud of our ability to deliver a solution that adds value for our customers. Our license model encourages using voice automation with multiple workflows. We know that our customers must cost-justify the investment and it's easy to do with our voice automation solution.

Is it really true - can you voice enable a sample of a live application in a matter of days?

Yes, and seeing and hearing it for yourself is believing. We can showcase, voice automate a portion of a customer's live application, in one day. We typically work in a customer's environment using existing hardware, process and workforce to demonstrate this live. Depending on when you're reading this article we also, in this global pandemic situation, now offer a remote proof of concept.

If you grant us VPN access to your application workflow, we'll voice automate the process and demonstrating it for you online. Each customer has uniquely optimized order fulfillment processes in place using a variety of WMS or backend systems. We'll work with what the customer is using, including commercially available solutions such as IBM, Manhattan Associates, SAP and many more, as well as home-grown WMS solutions.

If people aren't familiar with voice automation from AccuSpeechMobile – can you give an example from your experience?

Voice automation is a common question for me – what is automation for us? We automate repeatable user actions, what I like to call “eliminating the dead processes” where interaction from the team is not necessary. This includes automating actions such as pressing buttons on the mobile device, automatically populating data to form fields where relationships are constant. The ability to include this automation with the speech-to-text and text-to-speech, as part of the same process – this is the magic combination.

Let me give you an example. For a food manufacturing receiving process, the original process was to receive 50 different pallets of the same raw ingredient, which, per the WMS workflow required the receiver to complete the same form each time, for each pallet. This would generate a unique LPN to keep track of the unique pallet ID. AccuSpeechMobile introduced voice commands and responses for the receiving workflow, coupled with automation which is programmed to receive the number of pallets indicated by the receiver as the same raw ingredient, and automatically generate the unique LPN's 50 times.

So, instead of receiving 50 different pallets of the same ingredient and filling out the form individually – it's now a single voice command. This adhered to all internal system requirements, significantly reduced the time spent on receiving and improved accuracy as well as employee job satisfaction, and it's implemented entirely on the mobile device.

How do you think AccuSpeechMobile's voice solution helps DC managers deal with the labor shortage?

This continues to be an important consideration and top of mind for managers of the order fulfillment process. Because AccuSpeechMobile's voice automation software solution increases the productivity of existing processes, it requires less workers to execute the current workload. The existing team can be trained quickly, and the efficiency measurements will show improvement almost immediately.

Voice directed workflows also assist with training the new work force or temporary team members. Using AccuSpeechMobile's voice directed workflow, new team members can become productive in a much shorter time period, the process is easier to learn, and it guides them through automatically. The workflow tells the new team member where to go, what to do, and it follows the process that you have in place. There are less mistakes, and the team is as fast as possible with redundant keystrokes and error-prone data-entry voice enabled and automated. “Fat Finger” mistakes are eliminated.



What's the most interesting process you've seen voice automated in the warehouse or distribution center?

Some of the most interesting process I've seen voice automated with AccuSpeechMobile are Audit Receiving, Pallet Receiving and Case Picking with Count Back. It's so rewarding to see the workflows that our customers have optimized with voice automation. We want to help our customers become more productive, quickly and for a reasonable investment. Each implementation is unique, it's always gratifying to see the results of voice automated workflows for our clients.

About AccuSpeechMobile

AccuSpeechMobile's unique, completely device-based solution voice enables and automates Supply Chain operations, including warehouse (WMS, ERP), distribution, field service and EAM applications (mobile inspection, maintenance and repair). AccuSpeechMobile extends the useful life of existing investments and connects to any warehouse management or backend system, allowing clients to rapidly achieve double-digit improvements in workforce productivity, increased accuracy, workforce safety and operational efficiency.

Supply chain, distribution, field services, enterprise asset management, logistics, retail and transportation operations benefit from AccuSpeechMobile's device-based approach, often deploying the voice interface within weeks and demonstrating productivity gains immediately. Leading organizations in industries such as Aerospace, Apparel, Automotive, Consumer Goods, Publishing, Retail, Sporting Goods, Manufacturing, Wholesale and more have voice automated multiple applications, demonstrating positive ROI in under 12 months. The AccuSpeechMobile software solution works with Android, iOS, Windows, TE and Web-based mobile devices. Voice Picking is a common first application for AccuSpeechMobile and additional applications such as packing, cycle count, put away, shipping and receiving are popular candidates for voice interfaces, extending the productivity enhancements across the distribution center.

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