



LEADERS

USING WAREHOUSE AUTOMATION TO ADDRESS THE NATIONAL LABOR SHORTAGE

As competition for workers continues to heat up, companies are turning to technology to help them overcome their biggest labor challenges. In this Insider Q&A, Engineering Innovation, Inc.'s Director of Business Development & Marketing Brent Gregory discusses how automation reduces manual processes in the warehouse, shows how organizations are using it to address the current labor challenges and offers some valuable tips on how to get started.

Q: *What warehouse automation challenges are companies facing right now?*

A: Companies can't find people who will show up to work consistently every day, while others can't even find temporary workers to meet their specific labor needs for the day. That's a problem across the industry. On the positive side, automation helps solve these challenges. However, one hurdle to automation can be cost, and especially when you decide to automate your entire operation at once. I recommend implementing automation in phases and by starting small. Look for the particular pain points in your process (e.g., where heavy manual processing is taking place) and then use light automation as a starting point. Relieve those pain points and then move onto the next batch until you've automated your entire operation over a multiyear period, versus trying to do everything all at once.

Q: *Where do you see warehouse automation headed?*

A: Many companies don't realize all of the functions machines like the Chameleon can manage. They might see automation as scanning and sorting (i.e., it can read the barcode on the box and then sort it to different bins), but our machine can actually do more than that. It can also dimension, weigh on the fly and it can put labels on packages. The business case for the Chameleon is so strong that we have customers that have turned off the lights in their operating warehouses; there's no need for humans to be working in there. Going forward those scenarios are going to become increasingly prevalent.

Q: *How are companies benefitting from their warehouse technology adoptions?*

A: One customer started with our basic Chameleon system and used it for scanning and sorting. One year later this customer said, "Hey, can we add labeling to this?" Our Chameleon is designed to be modular, so we naturally said, "Yes, of course we can." We came in, took the machine apart like Legos, and added in a labeling module and a label applicator. The system was up and running and labeling packages the following day. The company has already reduced its peak operating costs by 17%, having just added this functionality to their machine in the fourth quarter of 2023.

Q: *What else should organizations know about what's coming next?*

A: We're hearing a lot about "ugly packages," which can mean overweight or oversize, as well as those infamous poly bags that can come in any size and shape. The latter can get crumpled and are

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difficult to take downline on conveyor-based machines. Our sorting module—which takes packages off the conveyor and diverts them to ensure that they don't get snagged or fall off the machine—is currently being upgraded and will be released this year. That will help companies address the ugly package issue and keep their operations running smoothly.

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