



“When we decided to move and expand our Memphis area distribution centers, we had a strong commitment to succeed. We started with top notch facilities, software and hardware. Implementing RedPrairie was an important part of this commitment.”

Cindy Fournier,  
VP Operations, Diamond Comic Distributors, Inc.

## The Customer

Diamond Comics is the world's largest distributor of English language comic books and graphic novels. They also distribute comic book-inspired action figures and other pop culture products. Diamond Comics ships over 20,000 SKUs to over 4,000 comic book shops and other retailers around the world from their new consolidated distribution center located near Memphis in Olive Branch, Mississippi.

## The Challenge – Managing growth

Over the past dozen years as Diamond Comics' business grew, their distribution operations spread across three buildings, which created predictable inefficiencies. Part of the reason for growth was the opportunity to move from a strictly buy & sell arrangement to a consignment type model that allowed the distributor to hold much more inventory. At the same time, non-printed matter products such as action figures took off as well. All these changes led to much more inventory depth and cube, yet they were still trying to manage it with a 20-year old host system that did not know where the inventory was.

Explains Cindy Fournier – VP Operations, Diamond Comics, "Our host system knew how much total inventory we had, but did not know how much was in each bin. Therefore, replenishment was problematic and picking was interrupted when employees discovered empty bins. Also, picking was done manually from printed pick tickets, so it was prone to errors."

## The Solution – Consolidate and automate

To change their distribution operations from a headache to a competitive advantage, Diamond Comics decided to consolidate all distribution into a new 600,000 sq. ft. facility and automate with the latest technologies, including RedPrairie's Warehouse Management and Workforce Management systems. RedPrairie also provided RF equipment from LXE® and a voice picking solution from Vocollect®. All technologies except the Workforce Management system were rolled out with the launch of the new facility.

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Del Duquette  
WMS Manager, Diamond Comics

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## "Everything Changed"

This was no ordinary WMS implementation. In addition to consolidating operations from three facilities into one, Diamond Comics was going from manual operations to RF and voice directed work. They also added mezzanine picking modules.

"Everything changed," Fournier says. "We had to rewrite standard operating procedures for every position because they all would be done differently now."

In addition, Diamond Comics switched to a cross-zone cartonization approach where workers pick only the portion of an order that pertains to the products in their zone and then pass the carton on to the next zone. "Formerly, each employee picked an entire order," explains Fournier. "That was less efficient because there was a lot of travel involved. In addition to greater efficiency, pickers now get use to the products in their zone and can identify problems as they occur. This allows us to react more quickly."

## Change Management is Key

With so much change going on all at once, effective change management was critical. Diamond Comics management let employees know as soon as they purchased the new systems and showed how they would help fix many existing problems. They then provided four months of training before system go-live, pulling employees off the floor into a training environment where they could use the new equipment and systems without any production pressure.

As a result, "all employee reaction to so much change went very smoothly," says Fournier. "The employees thought the new RF and voice technology was cool."

## Wham! Bam! Results

Like their comic book action heroes, Diamond Comics achieved Wham! Bam! results from their new facility, systems and technology. Comments Del Duquette, WMS Manager at Diamond Comics, "Because of the consolidation from three sites into one at the same time as the implementation, it's hard to gauge how much each system contributed to our improved efficiency. But we know we could not have survived the consolidation without the RedPrairie system. Our inventory accuracy and fill rates went up dramatically. Our fill rates went up to between 97 and 98 percent."

"Another important benefit for us is the employee accountability we now have," adds Fournier. "We can see exactly who did what so we know where additional training is needed if problems come up."

These labor improvements were achieved despite the fact Diamond Comics temporarily suspended use of RedPrairie's Workforce Management system, which had been used at the previous locations, while they rewrote the job standards. Their plan is to give employees 90 days to get use to the new equipment and procedures before rolling out Workforce Management. They expect to see even greater labor savings once this system is back on line.

## For more information

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The decision to consolidate distribution facilities and implement the latest technology has been a good one for Diamond Comics. Their distribution operations are now more efficient, accurate and accountable.

"When we decided to move and expand our Memphis area distribution centers, we had a strong commitment to succeed," concludes Fournier. "We started with top notch facilities, software and hardware. Implementing RedPrairie was an important part of this commitment."

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