

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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The Game Changer

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As you read this article many of us are in the peak of spring. For us, these eight weeks are what represent 60% of our business' dollar volume for the whole year. For some of you, it may even be more. This leads me to the point of this article where I'd like to talk about planning for this peak and some of the tactics that could truly be a game changer and assure you a smoother, more successful, season.

The challenge

Our company struggled with its peak shipping days, and in last year's case, we had multiple days of shipping 130 loads per day. Our yearly average is closer to 30 loads per day. You can understand the challenges this presents and how it can stretch all teams. It's critical we have the right amount of carts in the right location. It was just as critical to assure logistics had trucks at the right location at the right time. In order to solve this we also needed to assure assembly and picking teams could complete their tasks for the arriving trucks.

We concluded there was only one way we could possibly pull off this massive challenge. We needed to plan. This meant the game was on!

Planning for success

We began by evaluating processes, pulling the data and building the plan. Through this process, we concluded we simply couldn't ship more the way we were doing things. Our typical shipping process was orders in by 10:00 a.m. would be shipped the next day. This translated into operational chaos, more errors and delays, causing frustration and burning teams out. In the past, I would frequently leave the shipping warehouse at midnight to be back in in the morning at 6:00 a.m., seeing the shipping team still loading trucks that had already been worked for more than 18 hours. This was simply not sustainable.

We came to one conclusion: We needed better flow and the only way to achieve that was to build a structured plan that would support continuous flow without the bottlenecks that ultimately grinded us to a halt at times.

The solution

Taking the data we had on past years we could calculate and forecast the number of carts we needed to ship. We broke our day into three waves that have shipping windows. This included an 8:00 a.m., 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. load window.

We used two staging areas: in the first staging area, the assembly area orders were consolidated by cart and customer. This product would be held in this area until the next shipping wave window occurred at 1:00 p.m. The second staging area was the shipping floor. By 1:00 p.m. the shipping floor had been cleared and trucks were

loaded from the 8:00 a.m. wave.

This three-way process was used in sales in cut-off times with the greenhouse picking teams, the order assembly team and finally the shipping floor teams. Obviously, this required clear planning with measured flow to assure no given window was overwhelmed. Our goal was increased accuracy, quality control and more timely delivery, all the while expecting a better quality of life for our employees. We definitely had to work through some internal struggles to achieve these goals.

The win: success

I consider this one of the biggest single wins in our company history. This three-wave plan worked in every way. It achieved our goals and exceeded expectations. With the odd exception, our peak season today is very smooth, and unless there's a breakdown, the bottlenecks are gone. Last year in our peak day, the shipping team had gone home by 8:00 p.m.—absolutely amazing when just a few years earlier that same team would have worked another 10 hours.

Planning for success is the solution to our peak volumes. Managing the flow in all areas assured we have the carts where and when we needed them, the space to assemble, and the timeliness of trucks to deliver to our customer in a timely window.

Wishing you the very best in this intense season and also hoping this article might promote some thought for you and your teams to reduce your stress and make for a more successful season! **GT**

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