

# VITECH



DC VELOCITY



*The DC Velocity Q&A*

## **if at first you don't succeed ... : interview with Robby Dhesi**



*When he quit his job in frustration over a failed WMS installation, Robby Dhesi never dreamed he'd someday be back overseeing another one.*

Morgan Hill, CA (June 09) - With one successful warehouse management system installation behind him, Robby Dhesi had no reason to doubt that he could do it again. Before joining Fox Racing in 2003, he had spent five years in operations management at Fisher Scientific, where he served as project manager for a WMS installation. So he had no reason to doubt that he could duplicate that success at his new employer. This time, however, the WMS installation didn't go quite as smoothly as planned. Frustrated, Dhesi left the company in 2004.

That was not to be the end of Dhesi's association with Fox Racing, however. Although he himself was dissatisfied with the WMS project's results, Fox was impressed enough with Dhesi's previous work that it tried to lure him back. Dhesi came back to the fold in late 2006. Today, he serves as the company's director of distribution. In 2008, his team wrapped up another warehouse management system installation, and this time, Dhesi is satisfied with the results.

He spoke recently with DC VELOCITY Group Editorial Director Mitch Mac Donald about his career, the lessons learned from the ill-starred WMS installation, and why his high-throughput facility uses virtually no automated equipment.



### **Q: For those unfamiliar with the company, what is Fox Racing?**

A: Fox Racing is a leading manufacturer of motocross and fashion apparel that's sold online as well as through our company stores and through retail stores worldwide. We fill all of those orders out of our distribution center in Morgan Hill, California.

### **Q: What are you working on as we speak?**

A: We're just coming off our peak season, so right now, activity is dying down. This past peak shipping season was the first real test of our new warehouse management system, which went live last April. As it turned out, we were able to process over 5,800 orders a day—in less than 10 hours, in fact. That would have taken us two and a half days with our old system.

### **Q: Was it the chance to oversee the installation of that new system that drew you back to Fox Racing?**

A: Yes. I came back to Fox to handle that specific task. I wanted to lead the selection process, find the consultants, see the implementation process through, and deliver a successful project.

**Q: What did you do differently this time around?**

A: The issue with the 2004 installation was that we failed to clearly define what we were trying to achieve, and we looked for an ERP (enterprise resource planning system) that would meet our distribution requirements. It became clear to me that the system we installed wasn't going to meet those requirements, and that was my major reason for leaving Fox. Basically, we failed because Fox didn't define everything clearly.

**Q: That's a critical part, isn't it?**

A: It really is. This time around, my team did its due diligence during the selection process. For example, we put together an extensive RFP that ran over 1,000 lines. Eventually, we chose a WMS from HighJump Software. I also hired an integrator, **Vitech Business Group Inc.** out of Bellingham, Washington, to do my configuration. They did a lot of the heavy lifting.

**Q: You're now almost a year out from the project's completion. Is it meeting expectations?**

A: We have exceeded all of them, basically. We used to be able to receive about three containers max on a given day. Now, we are receiving five to six. In our outbound operations, we've decreased our staff across the whole company from 132 to 107. Our goal is to get that down to 83 by the middle of the year.

**Q: I understand that you also brought in voice recognition technology. Was that something you planned from the start or was that something that the folks at Vitech suggested?**

A: That was something that **Vitech** brought to the table at the design stage. I was concerned about going directly from paper to voice and skipping the whole RF generation in between. What **Vitech** did was set up a voice pilot for the founder of the company. First, we had one of our pickers pick eight orders using the normal process, selecting items from a paper pick list. It took him 45 minutes. Then, we trained our founder on the voice system. After just an hour and a half of training, the founder was able to pick the same number of orders in 21 minutes.

**Q: In your view, what's the key to harnessing the capabilities of whatever technologies you're using to make your system run as efficiently as possible?**

A: My philosophy is that you can take any system—whether it's a Manhattan system, a RedPrairie system, a HighJump system, or any tier-one system—and it's going to work. They have already proven they are tier one. Really, the critical piece that it comes down to is the processes. You know, laying out the processes so that they're simple enough that your employees can follow them without having to think too deeply about what exactly they need to do at this particular screen. During the design stage, we worked really hard to make it as simple as possible. Currently, we continue to do that. We continue to look at every single process with a microscope and say, you know, with this system, how many times are we touching "X"? Do we need to touch this that many times? Could we get the system to do some of our thinking?

**Q: Although you're using a WMS that's supported by voice and other types of technology, your operation isn't what we'd normally think of as highly automated, right?**

A: No, we really have no automation at all. In fact, we spent less than \$16,000 on hardware. That was a deliberate decision on my part. Fox has been experiencing double-digit growth in recent years, and as I see it, investing in a lot of conveyors and automated systems could limit our options for expansion. Everybody says you can take this kind of equipment with you, but really, it is pretty difficult to do that. How are you going to take it with you when you're building a new facility and you've still got to operate this one?

**Q: So, the installation is done. 2008 is a wrap. What are your operational goals for 2009?**

A: Our operational goal for 2009 first and foremost is flawless execution—both from a process and from an employee/management standpoint. We face the same economic challenges that every other company faces right now, and we have to cut expenses by 10 percent.

The other goal that we set for ourselves is to have a contingency plan for every single process in the warehouse. Today, we're using voice technology—a system from Vocollect—but we're using RF as well. We are going to roll out voice to other areas so that if one of the applications isn't acting properly or we have some other type of system breakdown, we will still be able to get orders out the door.

**Q: Let's shift gears a bit. In your opinion, what are the key skills a logistics executive will need to succeed in the 21st century?**

A: In the case of an executive person like myself, you have to have the 10,000-foot view. You can't be in the forest. You've got to be thinking about all the minute details—everything from the number of boxes the operation is handling down to whether you're hiring the right people. The right people are not necessarily those with advanced degrees; they're people you can trust, who are going to be committed and passionate. It is very difficult to interview for that type of person.

**Q: What advice would you give to a young person interested in a career in logistics?**

A: I'd tell them that the best thing they can do is improve their people skills. Beyond moving the boxes, beyond handling a trucking fleet, this is a business of people. There are systems involved, but you've got to be a good people person.

You've got to be able to interact with people at all levels. You have to be able to understand what that material handler is doing every day to make an impact. Then you've got to be able to manage the managers as well. If you have the right people skills, you're going to succeed.

**Q: Any closing thoughts?**

A: The only thing I'd like to add is that if you work in distribution, you can expect to face all kinds of challenges in the course of your career, and you'll need outside partners to help you. Make sure you choose your partners with a critical eye. You've got to find people who have the experience and the passion that you have. They've got to have a vested interest in making you successful, not just selling you something.



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At Vitech, we use our knowledge, experience and passion to achieve exceptional levels of supply chain performance for our clients. We are focused on providing our clients comprehensive solutions that solve their supply chain challenges and enable their operation to perform to its full potential. Vitech forms strategic partnerships with the industry's leading software, hardware and service providers to deliver complete supply chain solutions. Commitment to our customers' success ensures they achieve the best investment-to-return ratio in the industry. To learn more about Vitech or our partners, visit <http://www.vitechgroup.com>.

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