

The Ultimate Guide to
Warehouse Automation
Success:

3-Step Implementation Plan

E-BOOK



Introduction

As more supply chains are increasingly driven by technology, many organizations are investigating the benefits of an automated warehouse. Warehouse automation can make your operations far more accurate, productive and responsive, however, it is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. In fact, it's a far cry from a system that you can simply buy, plug in and watch the magic happen. But as the old saying goes, "Nothing worth having comes easy."

If automation is something you are considering for your warehouse, you will need to do some careful research and planning to make sure you're making the right decision. All this hard work will help make the transition to automation as smooth as possible for your business. To get you started on your journey, Tecsys is reviewing the three stages of warehouse automation success: preparation, evaluation and implementation.

In this e-book, we will examine the three steps you need to take in the implementation stage of warehouse automation.
In this stage, you will be communicating, installing and training your organization.

Ready to Implement?

You have looked at your warehouse problems and decided automation is the right path forward. Then you have evaluated potential automation projects, potential solutions and selected one. Now you are ready to start the implementation of the project.

For this final phase of your warehouse automation project, follow these three steps to help ensure you successfully reach the finish line.



1.

Communicate the Plan and Train Your Staff

Hardware and software installations are straightforward. Most failures lie in the misunderstandings of the processes and people involved in operating the warehouse before, during and after implementation. Yes, there is a project plan for the physical installation that vendors and in-house personnel will share. Often overlooked, however, is the value of sharing plans regarding how the transition will take place, how procedures will change and what training is needed. It is a worthwhile investment to take the time to build capability and confidence across your warehouse personnel (both on-floor and off-floor).



You will need to identify training gaps for the front-line workers and their supervisors. The advantages of new hardware and procedures adoption must be clearly shown to people at every level. Start at the top with corporate and warehouse general management messaging that blesses the efforts of the warehouse automation project team. The team can then provide suggested talking points that every director shares with their managers, who then share with their front-line supervisors and who finally share with front-line workers. One size of plan does not fit all types of employees. Tailor the training to the level as well and make it as visual as possible. If everyone understands why the warehouse automation is being done and how their jobs are changing, the implementation will be more successful. Train, check and retrain as necessary for greater success.

It is equally important to communicate with your customers, suppliers and partners. Customers don't want to see any changes other than benefits such as greater accuracy, shorter available time windows and higher levels of responsiveness. Nonetheless, they need to be aware and involved in plans for anticipating the go-live date and any contingency plans for when things inevitably go wrong. The same goes for suppliers and partners. So here are a few questions you'll want to have answers to before you start your implementation:

Build a buffer

Can your suppliers and partners build a buffer prior to go-live?

Data exchanges

Are your suppliers' and partners' systems prepared for the data exchanges?

Process changes

Are your suppliers and partners involved in how process changes will affect ordering, receiving/shipping, reporting and financial transactions?

Go-to person

Can your suppliers and partners have a go-to person ready as the primary contact when any adjustments might be necessary?

2.

Install in Phases and Have Backup Plans

The big reveal! While flipping the switch on everything at once as a go-live might be a dramatic and exciting strategy, you are likely to have more success if your warehouse automation project team breaks the installation into parts.

Here are recommendations for your installation:

Constant Communication and Status Checking

Constant communication between the warehouse automation project team and developers is vital. There should be many small steps with meetings and signoffs at each stage to reduce surprises and motivate everyone to keep continuous focus on the project.

Begin off the Warehouse Floor

Look at what pieces can be implemented off-floor first, transparent to all the warehouse workers. Behind-the-scenes IT infrastructure changes can be staged to prepare the systems to handle all the significantly higher transactions and data flows. Get customer, supplier and partner systems ready as well. Test out transactions and prove the value to all parties. Workers on the floor will lose confidence if office systems fail to provide the kind of responsiveness expected.

Simulate and Pre-test

Run simulations that show the flow of orders and products as they move through the system, checking whether any resources are exceeded or stretched too far. Plan to stay under theoretical capacities because the bottlenecks in the system will make everything less productive. If you don't have the expertise in-house, then contract with a third party that can evaluate the solution — whether it was designed in-house or by a consultant/integrator.

Prepare for Disruption

Have contingency plans for any temporary failures and disruptions if the hardware or software systems might not be working as originally envisioned. Have people that are dedicated (likely includes vendors and integrators) available during the turn-on and times when peak volumes might strain the system. Have plans for rapidly responding to the most critical disruptions.

Celebrate Easy Wins Early

For the first implementation, start in just one highly visible area that has the most likelihood of success and is relatively quick to implement. Celebrate successes to develop a greater level of confidence as more complicated parts of the project plan are implemented.



3.

Measure, Track and Improve

By the time you finish your typical one- to three-year project and your one- to three-month implementation timeframe, you can breathe a heavy sigh of relief. However, the warehouse automation project team isn't done yet. The project plan should include multiple post-implementation reviews to check the KPIs, variances, feedback from customers/suppliers/partners and true costs. Once you've collected this data you can start to analyze what didn't go according to plan and what can be improved. With this information you can determine if there are any new capabilities or benefits that were not anticipated.

The team will find that products and order patterns may have changed significantly since the beginning of the project. It may be months or years between projects, so document what was planned and learned for the next time. You will want to know what pieces were not included in this round of automation so it can be reviewed by the next project team.

Post-implementation reviews

Check the KPIs and variances

**Feedback from customers/
suppliers/partners**

True costs

Conclusion

When warehouse automation is done right, teams have less of a "thank goodness it's over, get me out of here" attitude. At Tecsys, we have seen organizations take more of a "that was fantastic, we've learned so much, what's next" approach to a project. A less appreciated aspect of warehouse automation is that on-the-warehouse-floor workers tend to feel a sense of pride that they are working in a more modern, higher-performing facility. There are fewer errors, less blame, more productivity and a sense of progress. Don't underestimate the value of those feelings on retention and additional gains in productivity and attention to detail. Through a sense of shared responsibility, a warehouse automation project can give your company and staff the opportunity to thrive.

Speak to a supply chain expert



About **Tecsys**

Since our founding in 1983, so much has changed in supply chain technology. But one thing has remained consistent across industries, geographies and decades – by transforming their supply chains, good organizations can become great.

Our solutions and services create clarity from operational complexity with end-to-end supply chain visibility. Our customers reduce operating costs, improve customer service and uncover optimization opportunities.

We believe that visionary organizations should have the opportunity to thrive. And they should not have to sacrifice their core values and principles as they grow. Our approach to supply chain transformation enables growing organizations to realize their aspirations.



www.tecsys.com

info@tecsys.com

Phone: 514-866-0001

Toll Free: 1-800-922-8649

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