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## Robot help: Small orange units navigate warehouse

By MARCUS RAUHUT Staff writer -----

At the Staples Distribution Center in Chambersburg, shelves full of products magically glide across the floor to employees.

They're not being pushed by employees or lifted with forklifts - they're being carried by the Kiva Mobile Fulfillment System, a small orange robot.

The Staples warehouse on South Main Street in Chambersburg was the first facility in the world to begin using the Kiva robots last year and today has 150 of them scooting across the floors each day.

"It's groundbreaking. This has the potential to change the fulfillment side of the logistics industry, and for us, it's been very successful," said George Turano, Chambersburg fulfillment center manager.

The robots, carrying shelves of products, quietly navigate across the floor with the aid of small barcodes on the floor. They bring the products to employees, who package them in boxes. A device at the workstation even shines a beam of light to help employees locate the products on the shelf.

As the carefully orchestrated robots move across the floor, they are able to recognize each other to avoid collisions. The Kiva systems run on batteries and even know when it's their time to go on break.

"They know when they are low on power to go over to the charger," Turano said. "Their programming is just amazing."

The robots break the mold of the traditional assembly-line model at the warehouse. Employees can work more independently and prepare custom orders quicker than ever before.



Turano said that learning to work with the robots is actually easier than learning the traditional method of filling orders.

"It only takes two to three days to train someone. With the other system, it took two to three weeks. The learning curve is very small," he said. "People love it. It makes their work a lot easier for them."

Staples associate Brenda Embly, who was working with the robots at the warehouse Monday, agreed.

"It's a lot easier and a lot less walking," she said.

Currently, about 50 percent of the 500,000-square-foot warehouse is operating with the robots, which were developed by Kiva Systems of Woburn, Mass. About 7,000 boxes are handled each day with the help of the Kiva robots, while another 7,000 are packaged the traditional way. Turano hopes to have the entire facility operating with the robots by November.

With the robots doing more of the work, Turano still expects the warehouse to maintain current staffing levels.

"It will allow us to bring in more volume without bringing in more people," he said.

Staples has 31 fulfillment centers across the country including the facility in Chambersburg. Another warehouse in Brighton, Colo., near Denver will be using the system soon, a company spokesman said.

"Through smart use of technology, like Kiva, Staples is increasing efficiencies and customer service levels as we grow a world-class delivery business. Kiva has enabled us to double the productivity of our associates and reduce new hire training time from weeks to days. With great people and innovative technology, the Staples Chambersburg fulfillment center will continue to be an important part of Staples' industry-leading growth," said Staples spokesman Mike Black.

A spokesman for Kiva Systems said the robots had been in development for about two years before they were unveiled about a year and a half ago.

Staples was the first customer - and so far the only publicly announced customer - but the same type of systems are used in other distribution centers across the country.



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