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Austin Lighthouse Empowers Visually Impaired Workers and Doubles Productivity With Mobile Robotics

As Austin Lighthouse aims to build the independence of people who are visually impaired, it was imperative for them to find a solution that would not only be accessible, but also enhance the skill set of their employees.

SUMMARY



Customer

Austin Lighthouse / Travis Association for the Blind.
Austin, TX

Industry

Warehouse, Distribution, and Manufacturing

Challenge

Improving productivity to stay competitive

Solution

- Fetch Robotics CartConnect100 Autonomous Mobile robot (AMR) system
- FetchCore Enterprise Software
- Zebra TC8300 Mobile Computers

Results

- Improved productivity by 2.5 times
- Reduced walking time for employees
- Enabled workers to become independent

Empowering warehouse employees while improving productivity

Austin Lighthouse, a non-profit organization offering education and training to people who are visually impaired, has been at the forefront of technology from the very beginning. With a warehouse and distribution space spanning a million square feet, their operations can be complex and involve substantial travel time for workers. In an effort to help their workers become independent, they introduced Autonomous Mobile Robots (AMRs) from Fetch that not only considerably reduced travel time for workers but also improved their picking productivity by 2.5 times.

About Austin Lighthouse

Austin Lighthouse, also known as The Travis Association for the Blind, was founded in 1934 to offer skills-based training, education, and a community for people who are blind and visually impaired. Through their Warehousing and Distribution Center, they provide logistical support to the federal government, primarily to the Department of Defense, as well as offer commercial warehousing services. Austin Lighthouse also has a manufacturing division that serves the needs of the U.S. Military.

Challenges:

Managing order volume amidst rising competition

With increased competition from large companies, Austin Lighthouse was finding it difficult to manage their rising order volumes. Annually, they complete more than 500,000 orders to over 10,000 locations globally while receiving shipments from around 20 trucks every day.

To stay competitive, they realized they would need to process these orders faster than their existing capability. Moreover, they also wanted to make it easier for their 450 workers (250 of them are legally blind) to handle orders, and spend less time walking around.

Solution:

Improving productivity with mobile robotics

Once Austin Lighthouse realized that they needed to change the status quo to remain competitive, they began their search for the right solution. The Lighthouse consulted with subject-matter experts, such as warehouse designers and industrial engineers, to reach a conclusion. They selected Fetch AMRs (CartConnect100) as this was the only robotic solution that was accessible and met their facility's safety standards.

They integrated four AMRs into their facility with the support of Fetch engineers and mapped a route for cart pick up and drop off aligned with their warehouse design. Since implementing this solution, they have been using these robots every day to transport empty carts from one location to another as well as for case picking.

Because of specific accessibility features, like text-to-speech RF guns, voice system for case picking, and custom robot sounds and paths, Fetch Robotics was a clear choice for Austin Lighthouse over other market players. Our AMRs integrate seamlessly with external devices that were instrumental for the success of this project.

“We were drawn to robotics as a way to enable all of our employees to work smarter, not harder. Reducing the amount of walking they have to do to complete a task, in turn, reduces wear and tear on the body and opens up job opportunities to those with limited mobility.”

Alonso Perales,
Vice President of Business
Innovation at Austin Lighthouse



Results:

Enhanced productivity, better accessibility, and reduced travel time

One of the main reasons Austin Lighthouse integrated robots was to stay competitive by processing orders faster. With AMRs, they have been able to tremendously improve their productivity across their distribution operations. Let's see how it has helped them.

- Using robots has eliminated the travel required for picking up empty carts and transporting them to other locations.
- The FetchCore software helps them control these robots, change routes, and always keep a track of their position.
- The biggest benefit to them has been the significant improvement in productivity. Their pick totals increased 2.5 times after introducing AMRs.
- By introducing inclusive robotics technology, Austin Lighthouse has made work accessible for its workers.
- Working with robots adds to the skill repertoire of their workforce who are now managing both the robots and the software.

In addition, as career development of employees has always been a focus for Austin Lighthouse, their employees could get the opportunity to work with and learn about AMRs which prepares them for the future.



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