



# 5

## Tips for Successful WMS Implementations



**Open Sky Group**

Reach new heights of supply chain efficiency™

Open Sky Group  
866.359.4437


[www.openskygroup.com](http://www.openskygroup.com)

---

## Table of Contents

---

Introduction .....	1
A Crawl, Walk, Run Approach .....	2
Define and Plan for Success .....	3
Have Fun - and Celebrate the Wins Along the Way .....	4
Allow Time for Training .....	5
Let Your People Surprise You .....	6



**“Simple, clear purpose and principles give rise to complex and intelligent behavior. Complex rules and regulations give rise to simple and stupid behavior.”**

—Dee Hock

## Introduction

The quote above embodies a fundamental belief in our company and while we're not perfect, we really strive to keep things as simple as they can be, whether that's an invoice, a project plan or documentation. It's a guiding principle to keep us on our toes and one that's at the heart of this paper. Don't misunderstand - WMS implementations are complex things, with the complexity varying by industry, company, facility and many other factors. We believe they can also be rewarding, successful and even surprising (in a good way). Even if you are already in the middle of your project, read on for five valuable tips to help you have a successful WMS Implementation!

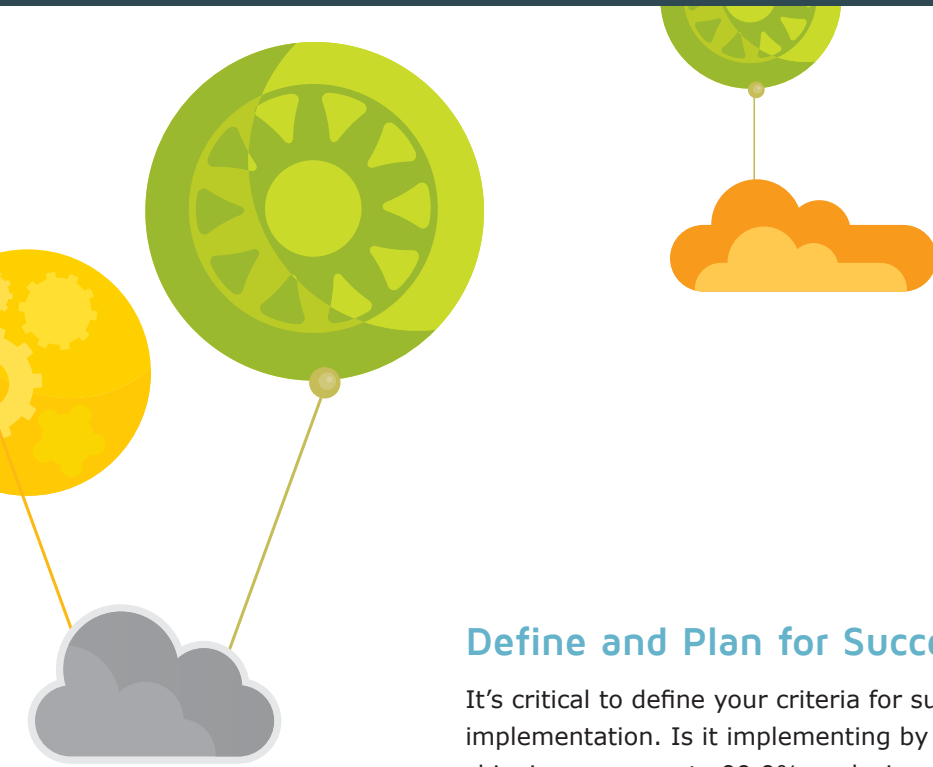


## Take a Crawl, Walk, Run Approach

Some of the most successful WMS implementations we have been part of were done using a crawl, walk, run approach. We took the philosophy of getting the system in as fast as possible to start reaping the benefits (not to mention that inventory and orders were already on the way!). This approach meant keeping things simple and uncomplicated to get the desired speed of implementation. The training was easier and faster, the system ran better and the results were clear when the first trucks came in and the first shipments went out. Over time, more complexity was introduced as the organization was ready to absorb it.

Another example of the crawl, walk, run approach is to bring parts of an organization into the WMS a piece at a time. For example, at a 3PL we can often onboard one client at a time while keeping the old WMS running for other existing clients. Or for a distribution warehouse, one approach might be bringing on direct-to-consumer first or wholesale or maybe even starting with kitting or light assembly, taking control of components and sending finished goods to the existing systems. There are many ways to slice it and there is usually an effective way to phase in a system.

Sometimes crawl, walk, run is not possible and you have to go big bang. This requires a ton of discipline and strong methodologies. You need to have a very complete playbook with all of the potential tasks, have great change control processes and be using a project management method based on empirical process control, such as Agile SCRUM. It can be done and big bang WMS implementations can also be successful.



## Define and Plan for Success

It's critical to define your criteria for success with your WMS implementation. Is it implementing by a particular date, increasing shipping accuracy to 99.9%, reducing replenishment time by half, meeting the projected volume for the next 5 years, having high levels of customer and employee satisfaction with the new system, etc.?

An outside consultant or software vendor can give you some ideas about what to expect. Combining that with your knowledge of your own people, operations and workload, it's possible (and very important) to set some realistic objectives. If your organization does not have any metrics, or isn't collecting the kinds of information that relate to the outcomes you want to improve, get a plan in place to start doing that BEFORE the implementation. Factor in how to measure these metrics for your design of the new WMS so that you continue to measure beyond the implementation (and can understand how soon you achieved your return). It's also a good idea to continue to measure or to update your system of measurement each time you make a change to the software that impacts productivity or other factors that are important to your organization.

A properly implemented WMS will pay back the organization many times over, in ways both tangible and intangible. We have personally witnessed WMS implementations that fully paid themselves back by just one variable within a year (i.e., in better rotation of expirable inventories). We have also seen organizations grow their output without the need to grow their staff. A well implemented WMS will become a critical asset to the organization and far outweigh the cost of implementation and ongoing maintenance and support.

## Have Fun - and Celebrate Wins Along the Way!

The degree of fun will depend a lot on your culture. In an important undertaking like this, there's no doubt there will be tension, but finding ways to add appropriate humor and taking short breaks can help defuse it. There's a lot of effort involved, and with the right balance of short and long term goals, there's no reason your team can't experience a feeling of accomplishment throughout the entire project. Don't wait for the game time clock to expire (Go-Live) before you kick up your heels; celebrate each milestone as it occurs. A team that can cheer for the little wins will maintain an upbeat attitude throughout the project.

Don't forget to publish your successes and results at different milestones before, during and after the implementation in a concise and meaningful way to the audiences that matter (like the WMS implementation team, those you report to, Board of Directors, etc.). This will make the celebrations even more meaningful.

And while not everyone's idea of fun is getting a box from one place to another, it can actually be very rewarding. Watching a completed system coordinate moving hundreds of boxes from Point A to Point B in synchronized chaos – and knowing you had a hand in developing and improving that process? That can feel pretty good.

### Picture this: A cross docking site.

#### **Before Implementation**

A full facility with forklifts charging around to get everything loaded before 7:00pm.

#### **After Implementation**

An almost empty facility at 2:00pm with forklifts wandering around looking for something to do.





A facility was processing 90 trailers before the WMS implementation. After the implementation, they were processing 200+ trailers! And, there was more advanced handling within the facility. Deploying a good software solution more than DOUBLED the facility's output!

## Allow Time for Training

Pressure to make a WMS software implementation live and successful by a certain deadline can tempt you to cut corners. Here are just three of the many reasons to keep WMS Training in your schedule:

### **WMS Training can help uncover improvements and cost savings.**

In preparation for a good WMS training program, it forces a step-by-step re-inspection of your processes from an operational perspective. This might be first chance you've had to focus solely on the day-to-day operations and procedures, and a second look can sometimes uncover some surprises that weren't revealed earlier in the project. These new discoveries can then be incorporated into the software design – and limit surprises at Go-Live.

**WMS Training shortens transition of ownership.** The implementation project team is generally made up of more than just your employees and there is usually a target date for all of the external project personnel to complete their time on-site, or on the project altogether. Training can help ensure a short transition of ownership from the implementation team over to the future owners of the system (i.e., IT or day-to-day users).

**WMS Training makes onboarding new personnel easier.** A good training program will generate valuable and useful reference documentation that serves as a reminder to trained personnel and supervisors and can also become an important (and ready-to-go) aid for onboarding new personnel.

## Let Your People Surprise you

The best WMS implementations allow or encourage user feedback early on to ensure nothing is overlooked and the new systems are as efficient and usable as possible. The quiet forklift driver over in the corner might be a thinker who is analyzing everything that occurs. Find a way to get him or her to open up in conversations, maybe while passing by them in the warehouse. Those people can point out important details that might easily be missed.



### AUXILLARY FUEL

Listen to your users...even the quiet ones. They know what they are talking about. Get them involved early on because people are generally afraid of change and this will help alleviate some of that. Early exposure to the new system may also lead to some surprising ideas (good ones!). If you muffle the voice of the users, most likely you'll have a rough ride in front of you.

Once you realize what a WMS system can really do, you'll be making a list of what new things you want it to do next. Use your definitions of success to help prioritize what you tackle first. Don't take on too much at once though; crawl, walk, then run.

Another piece to this that we see very often and almost no one expects is that someone in your organization will really stand out and shine. We have seen 3rd shift replenishment lift operators, supervisors, inventory control specialists, customer service representatives, project managers, etc. become the most valuable players and superstars of an implementation. Some people just really take to software applications. They are not afraid to play, experiment, push every button and ask good questions. They truly want to see the organization do a better job and they understand

the vision of what the new system could do for their company. After the Go-Live, these people are usually elevated to a new position and role that takes advantage of their skills and passion; and the business benefits greatly by having reduced needs for outside support and having someone who can see how to solve new problems with the system vs. working around it. Some of our own consultants were those very people. These kinds of people, however, do not achieve this status on their own or without help.



## Some events that must take place for someone on your team to surprise you during a WMS implementation:

1. It is critical to pull the people on the WMS implementation team out of their day jobs and let them focus full time on the implementation. This is the only way they can free their minds from the day to day and see the big picture.
2. They need someone who can mentor them. Typically this is an outside consultant who is very knowledgeable and also a good teacher. And, of course it helps if they are friendly and can build a good relationship. These friendships last a lifetime.
3. It is important they have all the training materials at their disposal, including good test environments to “play” in.
  - A development environment separate from the testing environment is a good general practice
4. It is critical for management to recognize the new value of this person and their new skills. Carve out a position in the future organization where they can continue to grow.
  - WMS Administrator and WMS Super User are common titles for these people
  - Assign them to help in future implementations, upgrades and at other facilities – you won’t regret it!



### AUXILLARY FUEL

Remember, replicating what you already have will not put you where you want to be. Keep an open mind of what the new WMS can do, not what it can’t do (but your old system can). Challenge your people to find ways to solve it under the new system. If you model your new WMS with the old one, guess what? You’ll wind up with your old system. True, nothing will get worse, but nothing will get better either.

It’s awesome to see in action – and nothing makes upper management happier than having every order picked and shipped by the end of each day... or in less time than it used to take. Now you finish each day replenishing and performing those tasks that you could never find time to do before.

Have or define simple and clear areas of responsibility and authority. This will reduce confusion and finger pointing.



## Feeling better – or worse - about your WMS Implementation?

[Email us your experience / lesson learned / advice from your implementation experience.](#) With your permission, we'll post your story in our new journal, Flight Log, on the Open Sky Group website.

---

## Considering a WMS implementation or upgrade soon?

For insight into all the variables that can affect costs in your project, check out Open Sky's [7 Variables of WMS infographic](#).



---

Open Sky Group specializes in consulting services for warehouse and labor management systems. With highly experienced resources, we strive every day to be the best consulting partner on the planet for implementing supply chain software with a focus on JDA products (formerly RedPrairie® and now part of JDA Software Group). Open Sky Group is an Authorized Reseller of JDA WMS, WLM and other add-on products.

Contact Open Sky Group today to learn how we can help your company reach new heights of supply chain efficiency:

+1 866.359.4437  
[www.openskygroup.com](http://www.openskygroup.com)

Copyright © 2016 OPEN SKY GROUP. All rights reserved. This publication contains proprietary information of The Open Sky Group, LLC. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of The Open Sky Group, LLC.

The Open Sky Group, LLC  
1421 E Broad ST  
STE 305  
Fuquay-Varina, NC 27526-7119

The Open Sky Group, LLC provides consulting services for JDA (formerly RedPrairie®) Supply Chain Software Solutions. RedPrairie® is a registered trademark of JDA Software Group, Inc.