Memphis-based Avery Outdoors manufactures hunting equipment primarily for the waterfowl hunting market such as duck, goose and the like. According to Alan Hughes, VP and owner, Avery’s customer base consists of sporting goods stores around the country and offshore from the small mom and pop stores to larger outlets like Dick’s Sporting Goods, Gander Mountain, MAC’s and Rogers.

Legacy System Challenges
Diane Shellhart, director of inventory control, for Avery Outdoors has witnessed the company grow very quickly to what it is today. Shellhart said, “Over the years, we’ve had some real challenges with our inventory system. There have been times when our system would show 15 items in inventory but the items were scattered across multiple warehouse locations. So we would call one of our 3PL warehouses to ask them if we really had 15 and the answer at times would be we’re not sure because we don’t know where they’re located.”

We Need To Make a Change
“We had a very rough year in 2011,” said Hughes. “We couldn’t get accurate shipping or inventory information because employees didn’t know where anything was and we could not afford another shipping year like 2011. We were rapidly approaching another big shipping season and with arriving containers from overseas to fill the warehouse, and doing our best to perform service at a level our customer desired, we knew we needed to do something fast before the next busy shipping season began.”

Implementing The New Process
Step 1 | Find a suitable and expandable warehouse location
Step 2 | pull all products under one roof
Step 3 | contract with known warehouse management and design companies
Step 4 | set up the new business location, fully operational, complete with WMS

Hughes realized that he had four months to sign a lease on a bigger facility, get moved in and build a system from which they could accurately ship their products.
He was looking for someone with experience who could come in and get the job done.

Avery Outdoors signed the lease and secured Maxline, Inc. a Memphis based Materials Handling Systems Integration Company and SATO America to get the facility ready. A concrete canvas of 120,000 square foot building was broken into three main bays. According to Hughes, “The team deployed SATO’s iTRAK software; servers, guns, backup, test runs, made us ready to go live in 16 days. It’s quite a process and we wanted to make sure to have all things in place that we didn’t know about. So having consultants come in and teach us helped tremendously.”

Degree of Accuracy
With the iTRAK system, Avery Outdoors was able to pick the orders with a high degree of accuracy. All that is required is to scan the barcode on the picking sheet for the item and pick according to the locations indicated by the iTRAK system.

The orders are then brought to the packing area where they’re packed and again checked for accuracy. Finally, they’re palletized, shrink wrapped and shipped via LTL, truckload or small parcel.

“It has made us a lot more efficient,” said Hughes. “We have gone from constant complaints from our customers as to the accuracy of the shipments to customers sending unsolicited accolades and it’s all because of the way we set it up. It’s not rocket science. It’s just getting the right people and having the right tools and then set it up and it works.”

Inventory
Hughes continued, “It has been a tremendous help for us during inventory. That was always a pain for most any business.”

For the first time, Avery Outdoors was able to shut down, scan all the locations of inventory, never manually key in anything, download from iTRAK to Excel, upload into their main software, MAS 200, and run a variance report that showed only a $3,000 variance on $4.5 million in inventory. Said Hughes, “It was extraordinarily accurate and was the best feeling we’ve had in a long time about inventory and gave us a confidence knowing exactly where things were.”

Slow Moving Items
Avery Outdoors is already utilizing a majority of their 120,000 square feet of space. Hughes said, “What I’m trying to do is use the iTRAK system to manage our inventory and space better, especially the bulky items that we don’t need to keep around, relinquishing the need to lease more space and invest more capital unnecessarily. For the first time we were able to run reports that identify and bring focus to moving out some of the older, slower moving items or items we have discontinued.”

“We’re now able to offer our dealers close out specials,” continued Hughes. “Offer them a great discount so they get to use it for their shows and it’s a win-win for everybody.

Real Time Visibility
Avery Outdoors has a real time visible location for everything. Customer service now knows that a container will arrive on a certain day and because it’s in real time, they know when product will be available and as a result, can begin telling customers exactly when their order will ship.

Cycle Counts and Process Training
Avery Outdoors does cycle counting and according to Hughes, “It is extraordinarily easy because iTRAK tells you exactly where to go and exactly how many items should be in that location. So we know right then if we have that amount of product or not. If there’s a mistake, we’re able to backtrack and see where the mistake happened.”
Customizations & Features
Hughes said, “One of the nicest things about the iTRAK system, in our situation, was that we didn’t have to go in on the front end and make a bunch of changes that were time-consuming and expensive, which would have delayed the project. We were able to put the system in, have it work, then after a few weeks we decided there were a few tweaks we wanted...a few customizations if you will. SATO was more than willing to make the changes.”

According to Shellhart, “I have a web-based version of iTRAK. It’s a link and when I click on the link it’s just like having a gun in my hand at my desk, which is 12 miles away from the warehouse. I can still see and do everything I need to do.”

One Stop Shop
And as for system set up, Shellhart notes “It didn’t matter what was our issue because I knew that I could send one request to one company, SATO, and had complete confidence that it was going to get fixed quickly.”