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Management Systems to Save  
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Q&A





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# Using Automated Dock Management Systems to Save Money and Relieve Bottlenecks



John Carroll, VP of sales & marketing, 4SIGHT

**J**ohn Carroll, 4SIGHT's VP of sales and marketing, discusses the key challenges facing the modern warehouse and shows how automated dock management systems can help companies streamline their fulfillment operations, gain efficiencies, and improve throughput.

The need to move products quickly accelerated when COVID-19 emerged, bringing with it high demand for certain essential products and an overall uptick in e-commerce sales. Companies that weren't very far down the road to digital transformation struggled to manage in this environment, while others were forced to address challenges that they'd never dealt with in the past.

A hotbed of activity and central point for all shipping activity, the warehouse or distribution center (DC) dock quickly became an area in need of attention and upgrade. In this Insider Q&A, John Carroll discusses where we are now, talks about the stressors being placed on dock operations, and explains how 4SIGHT Connect solves these challenges while also improving efficiencies and streamlining supply chains.



**Q:** *What's the current state of the nation's warehouse and DC operations?*

**A:** Urgent is probably the right word to describe them right now. With onshoring taking place, more inventory being carried, and the continued growth of e-commerce, the need for more efficiency, utilization, and velocity at the dock is becoming more critical. The situation with the pandemic has also driven just an absolute explosion of warehouse construction. It's been pretty amazing to watch.

**Q:** *What should the owners of new warehouses and DCs be thinking about when it comes to their loading docks?*

**A:** As they construct their new buildings, it's very easy on the front end to put in the type of dock automation and visibility systems they need to be able to handle these new demands. It's also easy to manage for retrofits, but it's even easier on new construction. We're seeing a lot of interest in 4SIGHT Connect; the current environment is driving more companies to explore their options in this area of the warehouse or DC.

**Q:** *What are the biggest differences from the old cumbersome manual ways of dock management?*

**A:** Manual tools like Excel spreadsheets, whiteboards, and 2-way radios are all ineffective at the dock, yet they continue to be used by a large number of companies. These tools are a major hindrance to utilization and velocity. What these organizations really need is real-time visibility into what's going on at the dock—from their offices, homes or any other place.

They need to know if trailers are empty, if they're ready to be loaded, or if they're full and ready to roll. If the latter happens and the truck winds up sitting around for too long, then the company will start to run up its detention fees. With our system, a dock supervisor can program an alert for any truck that's been sitting for a certain amount of time. Then, he or she can act on the problem and get it solved. This results in much higher efficiency and better dock utilization.

**Q:** *How long do these systems take to implement?*

**A:** Once the equipment is installed (i.e., the dock equipment and the control panels), it's a very short process to turn the system on and get it running; it's very easy. That's one of the beauties of the system. From an implementation standpoint, you literally turn on the gateway to the cloud, walk from dock to dock with your phone, scan a QR code, key in a few pieces of information, and you're up and running. We also have a standalone yard management system (YMS) for 4SIGHT and we plan to connect additional software into our products in the future.



**Q:** *Is the system applicable for any size company?*

**A:** Yes. In fact, from a scalability standpoint, it doesn't matter if a warehouse has eight docks or 200 docks, the system can handle both ends of the spectrum (and everything in between). In the past, these systems have been cabled and wired, and they had to go through a company's IT system and Wi-Fi network. This priced the smaller operators out of the opportunity. 4SIGHT Connect, on the other hand, reopens that door by letting them effectively manage their docks using a stand-alone system in the cloud. Because it's not using the corporate network or Wi-Fi system, corporate IT doesn't even have to be involved.

**Q:** *What are some of the other key benefits that 4SIGHT Connect presents at the dock?*

**A:** Some of the important "wins" include improved visibility, better security, quick setup times, and lower detention costs. The system also enables faster maintenance cycles and helps improve dock safety. In a vehicle restraint override situation, for example, a supervisor can be alerted to the situation and be able to investigate it, make a decision on it, or approve it. A repeated override at the same dock, for example, could be an indicator of a malfunctioning restraint in need of repair.

The 4SIGHT Connect platform also helps companies improve energy efficiency and cut their utility bills. A lot of companies don't want their dock doors left open when there's no truck at the dock, and the system can be programmed to send out an alert when the doors need to be closed. Finally, the system collects a large amount of data that companies can use to learn more about what's going on at the dock in real-time, and to make good decisions about those operations.

**Q:** *How does 4SIGHT Connect use passwords and dock authorizations?*

**A:** For overrides, most companies have a key that has to be inserted into a panel and turned in order to handle the override. Keys often get lost or misplaced, and it can take time to track them down and do the actual override. In a distribution environment where every second counts, this can add up to significant time and money losses. With 4SIGHT Connect Digital Dock, you can manage all of the passwords at each dock. You can set up a different password for each dock, change the passwords as needed, and never worry about keys again. Using their mobile app, supervisors can authorize an override, check door statuses, and review the day's data points.



**Q:** *How does the system help reduce detention fees?*

**A:** We've done a few studies showing that detention fees and drivers being held beyond their appointment time—either on the front end or the back end, waiting to get loaded—is becoming more of an issue and a real cost to facilities. Digital Dock lets you know how long a truck is at a dock, while our dock scheduling product Digital Gate timestamps a driver's ingress and egress at your facility.

For companies that may not have had any real “proof” when disputing carrier detention fees, this is a big win that can really add up financially. If a trucking company claims that a driver was onsite for four hours versus two, and if your timestamp says otherwise, then you have a definite leg to stand on when disputing any related detention fees.

**Q:** *What other features help manage drivers and deliveries?*

**A:** Our Digital Gate product includes a smartphone app that utilizes a feature called Mobile Xpress that truck drivers can use to check in and out of their appointments at a facility on a “touchless” basis. They can also use it to control an unmanned gate, and they can check into their appointment on the app, get a barcode, come up to the gate, scan that barcode, and open the gate.

There's no waiting, there's no check-in, there's no person contact to worry about. Then, they can just reverse the process on the way out. It really speeds things up and eliminates the lines of 20-30 trucks that you often see queued, waiting to check into a facility. The beauty of our system is that you can use it on any device—a mobile phone, tablet, or desktop—to get the visibility you need for good decision-making.

**Q:** *Why is now the time to implement an automated dock management system?*

**A:** This technology has existed for years, but it was difficult to implement and expensive. This prohibited many companies from realizing the benefits of automated dock management solutions. That's since changed, and now they have a cost-effective solution that's easy to implement and delivers tremendous benefit in terms of payback. Plus, the issues and the problems that 4SIGHT Connect eliminates are becoming more prevalent and expensive for facilities as they navigate this “new normal” operating environment.

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