



Guiding Spirit to Shipping Industry

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## MAERSK

**M**aersk's integrated logistics arm is hoping to improve its inventory management system by outsourcing the tedious job of checking pallet locations - to a robot. Partnering with Swiss startup Verity, Maersk is trying out a drone device that flies around the warehouse and scans every pallet in sight.

Verity's small drone carries high-resolution cameras, and it flies from one pallet to the next, cataloging identity and location. Traffic avoidance and interaction with human workers are non-issues because it works after everyone has gone home, even in the dark. It takes photos of SKUs and passes the data back to Verity's cloud-based processing system, which compares what the drone

## Maersk Tests Out Flying Drone for Managing Inventory

"sees" to what is recorded in the warehouse management system. Inventory errors like missing or misplaced goods get flagged for the warehouse's managers.

Maersk's Performance Team division installed the drone system at its Miami warehouse first, and the results and ROI are good enough that Maersk is planning a U.S.-wide rollout for locations with pallet racks.

High-quality, up-to-date inventory data is a big value-added for shippers, according to Maersk. Manual counting is dull and dangerous work since it requires workers to examine goods stored at height. It takes time, and it usually contains some amount of human error. For distributors and retailers, knowing the exact quantities of goods in stock is key information.

Labor shortages in the U.S. have also encouraged uptake for automating inventory checks and other warehouse tasks, according to supply chain analysts. "Many of our customers' shipping volumes have been growing year over year,

but the population isn't growing, so lack of labor is an existential threat to these businesses and is the No. 1, 2, and 3 factors leading to an interest in warehouse automation," said Chris Geyer, VP at robotics company Berkshire Grey, in a recent interview with Supply and Demand Chain Executive.

For Verity and Maersk, the next thing to add is a way to check the

barcodes on individual boxes on a pallet. "Today, there is no solution that can really cover all the boxes that sit on the pallet," said Erez Agmoni, SVP for innovation for Maersk North America, in a webinar last September. "There are a few ideas that we are entertaining [with Verity], and hopefully that will make it even more successful for us."

## The human touch

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Drone delivery could yield substantial cost savings on the shipment of everything from mail, to medicine to spare parts. **WSJ**