

A Guide To UAT And Why It's So Important

Regular updates to your warehouse management system will drive continuous improvement and help keep your operation at the cutting edge of current warehouse best practices. Read on to find out why spending time testing your warehouse management system is a worthwhile investment.

What is UAT?

UAT stands for 'User Acceptance Testing'. It can also be referred to as beta testing, application testing or end user testing. This is the phase where a piece of software is tested by the intended audience to identify and remove any issues before the changes are put into your live operations.

How do I know what has changed?

If a new version of your WMS software is being issued, the vendor should provide you with Release Notes. This is a document containing all the changes that have been made since your last version. This is where you will find the details of bug fixes or new features that you might want to take advantage of. If configuration changes have been made, depending on the complexity, you may either have a formal detailed specification document or a short description of the change.

How do I test the changes?

Essentially, UAT should cover all areas of the WMS system that you use, including both PC screens and hand held devices. Your vendor should assist you with reconfiguring one or two of your hand held devices to access the 'test' system to ensure the most important operations are tested in your real world environment.

Why am I testing features that I've not asked for changes in?

Your WMS vendor will scope, develop and test changes to the configuration or code of the base application. Their tests are focused on things like behaviours, scripting and database table updates. In a lot of cases, they will be using automated tools to generate many small tests with different scenarios and predictable outcomes to validate the stability of the application.

In the case of many cloud applications however, your instance of the software is configured specifically to meet the needs of your operations and it is therefore important for you to review each and every one of your processes after release.

Just as your original implementation will have included testing process flows and features, a new release requires the same – though typically much more focused and less rigorous – type of activity.

The common analogy to gain perspective on the importance of UAT in software release and acceptance is that your vendor has not simply changed the oil in your car but rebuilt the engine! That means that other systems within your car may have been affected, e.g., water pump, power steering pump, fuel pump, alternator, electrical systems, transmission/clutch, etc.

Who does the testing?

You do. While your vendor will have conducted rigorous testing to ensure the logic and behavior of the application, they won't have tested your specific process flows and actions within the application. Thorough testing has been described as too much work for busy warehouses, but it can be completed relatively quickly if you involve the people who use the system on a day to day basis, as they will quickly be able to identify changes to their normal operation.

What are the risks to my business if I don't perform UAT?

There is a much higher chance of an unforeseen issue causing a problem in the warehouse when the new software is released into Live. Your vendor will test all builds, but cannot test the many variables that exist within every warehouse, making the UAT an essential part of each new release. If a problem arises, it could mean that you can't receive or ship stock within the necessary timeframe. It can also take time to correct any problem within the code, which could further add delays.

What are the benefits of performing UAT?

When you have to justify your time spent on UAT to your company, it is important to know the benefits of testing.

- It allows you to minimise the risk linked with changes to a warehouse environment and maximise the successful and efficient fulfilment of orders to your customers.
- It enables you to take advantage of and try out new features in a completely risk-free environment. This is also an opportunity to impress the company with potential new ways of improving productivity and ways of working!
- It gives you confidence in the functionality delivered by the changes. This is particularly important if you have a team of people to manage.
- It allows time to train employees on the new features before they are put live, enabling a smoother go-live.
- It provides important time to identify anything missed in the vendor's testing that didn't take into account new processes that you may have introduced since your original implementation.
- UAT also provides an excellent opportunity for refresher training of existing and new team members. This is essential when operators are using the WMS for the majority of their working day.