

Little Tally in trial, spots item highs, lows, price goofs

November 11 2015, by Nancy Owano



Missing shelf items spell lots of missed opportunities. The customer sees the store is out of animal crackers and leaves, as the store nearby will not only carry the rest of the items on the grocery list but also the missing

crackers.

That is only one part of the picture plaguing [retailers](#). The IHL Group issued a research and advisory that spelled out the true cost of what they called "Inventory Distortion," referring to out of stocks and overstocks. In total, Inventory Distortion costs retailers collectively nearly \$1.1 trillion globally. "Or put another way, same store sales could increase 7.5% if this [problem](#) was completely fixed."

Another source of missed sales opportunity is misplaced items. The can of roach spray misplaced by another [customer](#) sitting on the dessert cakes shelf can be a visual turnoff that drives a customer away from the store section altogether.

That said, stores that devote time and labor for auditing shelves for out-of-[stock](#) items, low stock items, misplaced items and pricing errors are now the marketplace targets of San Francisco-based Simbe Robotics, which on Tuesday announced Tally.

The company promotes this as "the world's first robotic autonomous shelf auditing and [analytics](#) solution." That translates into one or more mobile robots autonomously moving about in large retail environments, during normal store hours, alongside shoppers and employees. Tally can help ensure the store's "planogram – the ideal placement of products on shelves in order to maximize sales," said Simbe.

Tally weighs approximately 30 pounds and stands 38 inches tall. This store-walker literally takes stock of the place—the machine can capture, report, and analyze the state and availability of merchandise. The Tally carries a modular mast of sensors for capturing shelf data.

The business pitch for retailers is that they can get a solution for taking care of Inventory issues, increasing revenue and improving customer

satisfaction. Uh oh, yet another reason to fear robots costing humans their jobs? The video pointed out that the solution "empowers staff to focus on customer service."

The machine is paired with the company's cloud-powered software platform and API; Tally was built on the open source Robot Operating System (ROS). The company said it can be integrated into the retailers' existing IT systems.

Will Knight, *MIT Technology Review*, said the founders of Simbe Robotics were involved with Willow Garage, developing advanced robotic hardware and software. Willow Garage, he added, spawned a number of robotics startups as well as ROS. The data collected by the robot, said Knight, is transmitted to a server, where it is analyzed and turned into alerts for the [retailer](#).

Tally is currently in trial with several North American retailers, said the company.

More information: www.simberobotics.com/

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