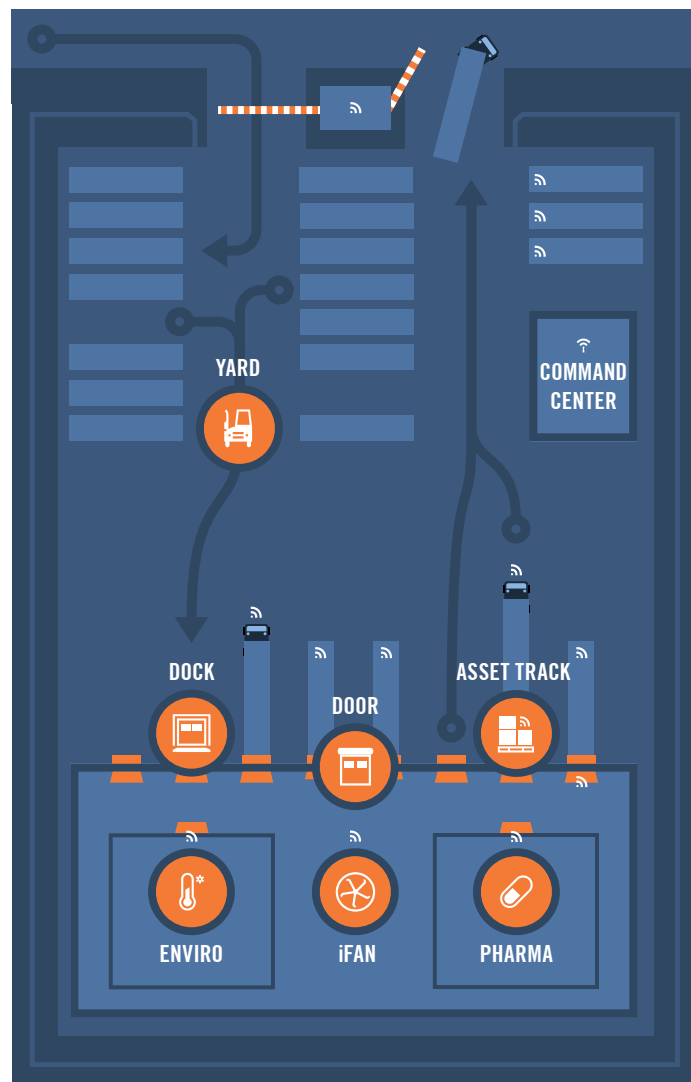




7 Critical Questions Every Facility Manager Must Explore *Before* Investing in a Yard Management System



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Executive Summary

As a facility manager, it's your job to track your trailers from the moment they enter your property to the time they leave, to know exactly where the trailers are, what's on them, where they need to be and how to get them to their intended destinations as efficiently as possible.

While attempting to manage such responsibilities using tools like whiteboards or even Excel spreadsheets will work to a certain extent, there is a much better way.

If you're having trouble knowing where your trailers are, or what's on them, still use radios to send tasks to your yard tractor drivers, spend too much time doing yard inventory, or maintain a large trailer pool "just in case", then an integrated yard management system (YMS) is the right solution.

However, keep in mind that choosing the correct integrated YMS may very well be one of the most important decisions that you'll make during your career. And, as a result, the right YMS investment will certainly yield numerous short- and long-term benefits to your warehouse operation. On the other hand, make the wrong decision about a YMS, and that could cost you and your company in any number of ways.

That's why you owe it to yourself and your company to explore several critical questions and get clear answers before you make your final decision to invest in an integrated YMS.

Choosing the correct integrated YMS could be one of the most important decisions during your career.

This white paper covers seven of these questions:

1. How can we ensure that our YMS will be easy to use and flexible?
2. Will your YMS integrate with our business operation in order to eliminate process inefficiencies?
3. We need more than a "one-size-fits-all" solution, so how flexible is your YMS to meet our current and future requirements?
4. Tell us about your level of logistics supply chain experience and how that differentiates your company from other YMS providers?
5. What kind of assurances can you give us that your company will be around to support us in the long-term?
6. Since YMS solutions require both software and hardware, what are your local hardware support capabilities?
7. We need a total systems solution approach to our YMS, so how will you help us achieve that goal?

The Questions

Critical Question #1:

How can we ensure that our YMS will be easy to use and flexible?

Under the surface, an integrated YMS is actually a complex product. This is due primarily to the amount of intellectual property invested by the provider as well as the YMS's inherent advanced technology. But don't let the technological depth and complexities of a YMS's capabilities get in the way of gaining a thorough understanding of how the right YMS can provide an optimal user experience.

Simplicity for users at all levels is an important benefit with an integrated YMS and a basic requirement if the YMS is going to be properly used and successful. Simplicity also reduces the need for extensive training since employees can be brought up to speed quickly, especially if your operation is a high turnover environment.

As with any computer-based system, a distinct feature such as an intuitive graphical interface will help guide YMS users in a variety of situations and circumstances.

For example, people who use Google to surf and search through the Web on a regular basis are accustomed to interacting on their computers or mobile devices in an intuitive way. An integrated YMS should be no different. Users expect to experience YMS in a Web browser-based environment, complete with brilliant, high-definition graphics that they are used to with other Web-based applications. Why subject your employees to a YMS that relies on archaic green screens when they are accustomed to all of the latest the Web has to offer with intuitive design, vivid graphics and more?

A YMS can guide users through yard tasks in multiple ways.

However, there's a much more pressing concern that lies beyond the intuitive graphic interface. One of a YMS's most vital benefits is that it is highly flexible so that it can guide users through a variety of yard tasks in not just a few, but a multiple number of ways.

For example, to make a move in the yard, a driver is told that he needs to move a particular trailer from its current location to a specific dock door. That move, however, could be one of six different moves in the task queue. The key to automating this process is that the driver now allows the YMS to pick the optimal move out of six given possibilities. Using a YMS, the driver now makes the optimal move for the facility.

With something as important as yard management for your warehouse operation, usability and flexibility are directly related to a YMS solution that your employees will either look forward to using at work each day versus one that they won't.

**Critical Question #2:**

Will your YMS integrate with our business operation in order to eliminate process inefficiencies?

While efficiency is paramount to the growth and success of any enterprise, implementing technology for technology's sake is not always the answer. It goes much deeper than that. A YMS should be designed so that it integrates seamlessly into your business's entire operation. Beyond merely technological expertise, your YMS provider must possess a full understanding of yard management from an engineering perspective as well.

Your YMS provider must possess a full understanding of yard management from an engineering perspective.

A YMS solution provider with a distinct engineering background will take a much different approach to yard management issues and inefficiency problems. Being both methodical and pragmatic, a YMS provider with an engineering mindset will be able to peel back problems one layer at a time to identify the most sensible and efficient solution for your particular environment. This is opposed to recommending the latest technological fad that might be garnering everyone's attention and trying to adapt it to YMS applications.

Instead, serious yard management issues are solved through a systematic approach to finding out what's causing your problems, and then engineering intelligent solutions via an integrated YMS.

A major auto manufacturer recently invested in a YMS that resulted in the need to relocate six dispatch personnel from highly inefficient roles into much more useful responsibilities. Prior to the auto manufacturer's YMS investment, those same dispatch people essentially spent their entire day calling trailers in and out of dock doors from their radios.

Such was a clear case of inefficiency on the part of the auto manufacturer, and a problem that the YMS has since solved. Instead of inefficient dispatchers on radios, the YMS is now making more efficient system directed and prioritized yard moves.

In addition, "ping-pong" communication is another process-related problem that YMS will eliminate. Ping-pong communication essentially means there can be a number of inquiries flying around at any given time via phone, emails, texts and even manual in-person checks by shipping clerks just to check on the status of whether or not a specific trailer has been loaded or unloaded.



With a YMS, automatic notifications will provide status updates on a specific trailer load, including the exact time it was unloaded or loaded, and its exact location for pick up. Customers can even be sent notifications on status updates that indicate when a specific truck arrives at the dock, when loading has started, the percentage of load completed and when the loading process is finished.

Overall, a key benefit to an integrated YMS is efficiently knowing the status of all of the equipment in the yard, including the status of actual product being moved into an actual trailer so everyone involved knows what's going on at all times. Therefore, all of the guesswork to managing your yard is virtually eliminated.

Critical Question #3:

We need more than a “one-size-fits-all” solution, so how flexible is your YMS to meet our current and future requirements?

Yard management challenges can change quickly or slowly depending on your particular operation's circumstances. Due to the current size of your operation, and anticipated evolution over time, the challenges and/or problems you might be facing now will not be the same as those you might have to deal with in a year or two. “One-size-fits-all” is certainly not the right solution.

To help you prepare for future needs, YMS modular capability lies at the heart and core what will allow you to conduct process changes in a phased approach to achieve the highest levels of efficiency as quickly possible.

Warning: the proprietary hardware trap will limit your YMS flexibility as technology changes.

A modular phased approach will allow you to tackle your most pressing problems first, and then when you're ready, you can move on to phase two, then phase three and so forth. A modular phased approach over time also provides a predictable path toward making steady improvements as your required gains toward more efficient yard management decrease with each step.

With regard to hardware needs for a YMS, it's best to avoid proprietary hardware requirements that will box you in to what is essentially a one-size-fits-all approach. Proprietary hardware also limits the amount of flexibility available as technology changes to meet future requirements. The best hardware solutions are off-the-shelf, which will also end up being less expensive in the long run as opposed to highly expensive proprietary hardware.



Instead of relying on your YMS provider to bring to market the latest in technological advances, you have the flexibility of selecting what makes the most sense based on what's currently available. Being forced to use a YMS provider's proprietary hardware can only cause potential problems down the road.

The same can be said for RFID tags. If a YMS provider only offers a proprietary standard-size RFID tag with a range of 20 to 30 feet, for example, than as technology evolves or your needs change, it will be extremely difficult and expensive to change out an entire RFID tag inventory. What if you need to start stacking trailers or containers three or four deep (nose to tail) which requires an RFID tag with a much longer distance read range? In this case, the best approach from the start—and while anticipating future needs—would be to have the flexibility and choice of implementing a larger RFID tag that has a read range of 100 feet.

Going off-the-shelf with RFID tag hardware in this example provides you with the capability to select what's best for your current circumstances and requirements while at the same time planning for the future.

Configurability is another important YMS flexibility capability, especially at the user level. If a user wants to change the YMS screen color from one shade to another, they should have that option. If a user wants to display six particular fields and not four others, they should have that option as well. And if the user wants to add descriptors or certain messages, then they should be able to configure that change within the application.

You shouldn't have to call your YMS provider to spend 100 hours of billable services just to make a small system configuration adjustment. Being able to rely on your YMS provider to make the necessary off-the-shelf hardware change or upgrade recommendations is another advantage over being stuck with limited proprietary hardware offerings.

Critical Question #4:

Tell us about your level of logistics supply chain experience and how that differentiates your company from other YMS providers?

Selecting a YMS provider who also has extensive experience in the warehouse industry can provide substantial benefits.

A YMS provider with an extensive knowledge of warehouse operations will provide a huge advantage.

A provider with this kind of unique experience and expertise has the in-depth knowledge and systems approach about how your warehouse operation outside of its four walls (from the gate, through the yard and to the dock, which is your connector to the inside) will best integrate with what's going on inside the four walls of your warehouse.



In fact, if you're dealing with problems involving dock slotting, load preparation and optimal door selection, then your existing warehouse management system (WMS) may not be capable of meeting those specific needs. Adding an integrated YMS, supported by a provider with an extensive knowledge of warehouse from an operations standpoint, will be a huge advantage.

Moreover, selecting a YMS provider who is operationally focused is critical as well. You need to know if they have a complete understanding of warehousing, logistics and business operations as a complete package. Be sure to ask your prospective YMS provider if they're focused on and does their experience guarantee the success of each of your operation's functional areas, such as the shipping and dispatch offices, the gatehouse, the yard house, the yard tractors and so forth.

If you already have a WMS with added YMS capability, and it's not performing as anticipated, nor can the WMS provider assist in helping you with your problem, ask your prospective YMS provider if they have the capability to improve your existing WMS/YMS set up. For example, if your existing WMS/YMS tells your driver to retrieve a specific trailer and he's unable to find the right trailer, your WMS/YMS is falling short and will need the proper improvements (e.g. automatic locating) to ensure it's providing you the information you need to properly manage your yard.

Critical Question #5:

What kind of assurances can you give us that your company will be around to support us in the long-term?

Working with a YMS provider that is backed and supported by a large multi-billion dollar company with an established industry track record versus newer or even start-up companies presents its own unique set of benefits.

When making an investment as important as a YMS, you certainly don't want to be in a position where you have to depend on a provider who must rely on investor capital or monthly SaaS (software as a service) payments to make payroll. The depth of your YMS provider's financial stability will ultimately ensure long-term support of your YMS investment.

Deep financial resources ensures the capability to meet highly complex customer needs.

Deep financial resources also translate into the distinct capability to meet highly specific customer needs with unique solutions. If you have a special or complex yard management requirement, you'll want your YMS provider to have the ability to call on the necessary resources to make whatever unique solution you require a reality. Additionally, your company will benefit from ongoing YMS software/hardware developments. This means that you'll receive the system enhancements and improvements that will add even more value to your YMS solution investment.



Critical Question #6:

Since YMS solutions require both software and hardware, what are your local hardware support capabilities?

There's no doubt that your entire warehouse operation, including the yard from the gatehouse to the dock, needs to perform at consistently peak levels. Because a robust YMS depends on both software and hardware components, you can't afford to rely on a YMS provider that doesn't provide quick access to localized hardware support. That local support must be available within one to two hours in the event of an emergency or unforeseen system problem.

Localized hardware support is a critical element of a robust YMS.

There is an ongoing misconception in the logistics and supply chain industry that YMS is primarily software driven, but that is simply not the case. The hardware support must be responsive to any variety of specific YMS solutions. That may mean much more than a depot maintenance response to simply swap out a malfunctioning piece of hardware with a replacement.

A good example is hardware components, such as a tablet and an RFID reader, that are mounted in a fixed location on a tractor with power supply cabling mounts and other support components.

If the tablet and/or RFID reader are not functioning properly, it may not be related to these specific hardware components at all. The problem could be related to engine block or battery cable wiring, or even an undersized battery. In this case, local hardware support is critical to finding a solution because the tablet or RFID reader manufacturers are not going to be able to provide the solution to the problem.

Geographically, it's also important for your YMS provider to not only offer local hardware support that can meet your needs wherever that might be—from the West to East coast of the U.S. and everywhere in between, for example—but that the local hardware support be connected to your YMS provider via exclusive hardware support agreements. This will ensure that the local hardware support you need to rely on has a vested interest in successful outcomes for your operation and your specific service situations.



Critical Question #7:

We need a total systems solution approach to our YMS, so how will you help us achieve that goal?

An integrated YMS should relate to every single process flow in a warehouse or facility operation beyond what a typical warehouse management system (WMS) is responsible for (i.e. picking product off of a rack). This means optimizing which dock doors to use and everything beyond that to the warehouse gate. Your YMS needs to relate to every single process flow in a warehouse or facility operation.

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If you've implemented a WMS that is supposed to also provide YMS capability outside the four walls of your warehouse, it most likely doesn't address the needs at your gate, nor does it address how to optimize your yard operation, nor does it address the inefficiencies of your specific location(s).

Say your system sends a list of moves to the yard trackers, for example. If you only have one person, then even though that's still inefficient, you're fine because he's the only person that has to make a decision about what to do next. However, if the moves are sent out to five people, now you face added concerns about zones, crisscrossing traffic and how to efficiently divide up the work because the system you're using doesn't have that capability.

That is the kind of problem solving that a total YMS solution approach will do for your yard management concerns. If your facility doesn't have any YMS capability at all, an integrated YMS can do all of this and more which will in turn provide you peace of mind that your warehouse yard is running at its most optimum level and as efficiently as possible.

How To Prepare for Your Yard Management System

Once you've decided that an integrated YMS is right for your particular yard management needs, **here are several tips on how to prepare three of the most important stakeholders in your organization:**

Preparation Tip #1: Establish a solid case for YMS to senior level management

In order to gain the necessary approvals from senior management, make sure you have all of your return on investment (ROI) justifications in order, that they are accurate and that they are enterprise-wide. If you can't justify a sound ROI within a short period of time, then you might jeopardize your entire argument to senior management.

Remember that senior management's role is to make your operation both efficient and profitable. The promise of saving a little money here and there without demonstrating a profound and direct impact to the bottom line is essentially meaningless. Senior management, "superusers" and IT are your key YMS stakeholders.

Projecting your ROI time frame is as simple as collecting some key statistics for your yard as they apply to your specific situation. For more information on calculating your YMS ROI, see our white paper, [Doing More with Less: Yard and Dock Management Systems From an ROI Perspective](#)

Preparation Tip #2: "Superusers" will pave the way to a smooth YMS integration

One of the keys to successful YMS implementation is to name "superusers" as early as possible in the process within each of your functional areas of your organization—including at the senior and project team levels—who will support and engage your YMS.

It's imperative to have your superusers identified and trained up front to ensure success with your YMS among all employees and staff. **Remember, superusers are the champions of your YMS.** They'll help foster participation and communication among all of your senior, project and superuser teams, including those on your staff who might be obstinate toward the new changes you're making in your approach to yard management.

Senior management, "superusers" and IT are your key YMS stakeholders.

Preparation Tip #3: Engage your IT team to maximize your investment

Your IT team is one of, if not the most important, support groups for a successful YMS implementation. Engage your IT team early and engage with them fully. The most productive and profitable YMS solution will be even more so with high level integration. **To achieve high level integration, you need full IT support.** Don't make the mistake of installing your YMS and then sometime after the fact informing your IT department head, "Oh, by the way, we recently installed a yard management system. Would you like to hear more about it?"



With high integration, the whole YMS implementation process becomes automatic which, for example, results in the need for less data entry and can reduce costs by up to an additional 10 to 15 percent.

Conclusions

This white paper has clearly defined the most critical questions that you need to explore **before making your final decision** about investing in an integrated YMS.

Take the time to consider the answers provided here that will help guide you through the decision making process. Also, you might want to take the time to share these answers with the key stakeholders in your organization who might be helping you make your YMS investment decision.

Consider that you need a firm understanding of the following:

- Why a YMS solution must be simple for end-users to understand and flexible enough to meet a variety of yard management requirements at any given time.
- The ability for a YMS solution to integrate into your entire business operation.
- Why one-size-fits-all is not the right solution.
- Why extensive warehouse knowledge matters.
- How your company can benefit from the deep resources and backing of a larger enterprise.
- The importance of local and dedicated hardware support.
- How a total systems approach is better than what any WMS's YMS add-on capability can offer.

If you don't, you run the risk of making an unsound decision about YMS solutions based on unsubstantiated promises clouded with unrealistic marketing claims and gimmicks. In the end, these will only result in a negative impact on the way your company handles its yard management.

To learn more about integrated yard management, as well as which approaches and solutions are best suited for your logistics operation or warehouse, contact us by email: info.4sight@assaabloy.com, or place a direct call to **866-691-1377**. You can also find out more, as well as gain access to an online calculator to project your own ROI, at www.4sightsolution.com.

In addition, to learn more about calculating your YMS ROI, see our white paper, [*Doing More with Less: Yard and Dock Management Systems From an ROI Perspective*](#)



About 4SIGHT™

4SIGHT is an advanced yard management system that solves logistical challenges from the guard gate to the loading dock. 4SIGHT can also manage the doors and assets inside your warehouse. 4SIGHT combines the loading dock, the yard and the warehouse into one comprehensive unit, providing managers with the visibility, reporting metrics and productivity tools they need to increase efficiency and profitability.

4SIGHT is comprised of a module-based system which makes it easy to choose the solutions you need to solve your operation's particular challenges, and 4SIGHT modules can be integrate with your existing business systems. 4SIGHT is part of the ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems portfolio of products, which brings even more well-known door and entrance control brands and experience. ASSA ABLOY Entrance Systems, based in Stockholm, Sweden, also expands our already extensive global presence and provides a larger platform of solutions to customers worldwide.