

## Kiva Systems, Sedlak Management Consultants form alliance

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Kiva Systems mobile retrieval robots pick up whole shelves and rush them to a picker for packing and shipping in a demonstration at a trade show last year in Cleveland. The wireless, electric-powered devices get directions from a central computers artificial intelligence program and make warehouse operations more productive. Kiva and Sedlak Management Consultants Inc. in Northeast Ohio announced a business alliance Thursday.

A Highland Hills consulting company said Thursday it will work with a Massachusetts robot manufacturer to help clients get two to four times more productivity out of their shipping and order-fulfillment operations.

The area firm, Sedlak Management Consultants Inc., helps companies as diverse as Columbus-based clothing retailer The Limited, doll maker American Girl and catalog and Internet merchant Lands' End solve the myriad logistics problems of shipping the right products to the appropriate customers.

As its new alliance with Kiva Systems Inc. takes shape, Sedlak will send consultants to Kiva's Woburn, Mass., headquarters and plant to become familiar with what a recent issue of Scientific American magazine suggested could be the workplace tools of the future-- ground-hugging mobile robots fitted with artificial intelligence.

Why the fuss? Kiva's retrieval system, introduced last year, might represent one of the biggest shifts in the product-handling industry since Egyptians used hand-to-hand conveyor methods to build the pyramids more than 4,600 years ago. In that project, ordinary workers moved more than two million limestone blocks.

"What most warehouses and shipping centers use today is basically the same kind of conveyor system," according to Mitch Rosenberg, vice president of marketing at Kiva. The new system sends shiny little wheeled robots into a warehouse with a product number. A central computer tells the robot the product's "address" and guides it, scooting and whirring, to the appropriate shelving unit.

The device then picks up the entire unit and carries it back to a human "picker." The robot then directs a laser pointer at the product to be shipped so the picker can grab it and package it.

"Kiva has developed an important new approach to the pick, pack and ship processes that offers unique productivity and flexibility for distribution center operations," Jeff Graves, Sedlak's president, said in a written statement. A close look at how the system works was enough to convince Graves to consider this system for use by some of his clients.

"We're thinking that Sedlak could serve a kind of Consumer Reports function for their customers," Rosenberg said. Sedlak would act as a disinterested but well-informed expert source to help explain to some companies how a mobile system like Kiva's might give them a competitive advantage.

How competitive? Kiva's tests have shown a two- to four-fold improvement in productivity over conveyor systems. "That means an employee can ship two to four times more products in a day using our mobile system than using even the best of the old-style warehouse systems," Rosenberg said.

Lou Cerny, a Sedlak vice president, talked about his exposure to the Kiva system by phone Thursday as he and an associate were driving back from a meeting with Kiva executives and their little orange robots.

"We act as an independent adviser to our clients," Cerny stressed. "We want to make sure we have a clear understanding of the right application of the leading technology." After spending time learning about Kiva Systems, he said, "That's what's got us excited about this approach. It *is* a leading technology."

Certainly, Kiva would not be the right solution for every warehouse, Cerny said. "One size doesn't fit all of our clients. But we certainly see this as a highly applicable technology. If we can use this to help some of them improve their productivity as much as it seems, that's a winner."