

South Florida CEO

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P. David Whitt

Taking advantage of wireless technologies to track warehouse inventory.
By Yeleny Suarez

David Whitt came to South Florida with a company that sold handheld data collection units — similar to the kind UPS or FedEx might use. During his time with the company, he says, he amassed “two Rolodexes” of people with whom he had talked about what to do with the information those devices could collect. After the device maker closed its local office, Whitt started calling on those people, talking about creating warehouse management software using handhelds. He founded his company, Boca Raton-based Wireless Data Systems Inc., in late 1990.

Today his warehouse management software, [TopShelf®](#), brings in a little under \$3 million in annual sales. As inventory enters a warehouse, [TopShelf®](#) uses a WiFi network to wirelessly send messages to handheld devices, instructing users what to do with the goods, including printing barcodes, scanning them and validating data.

Shortly before founding Wireless Data Systems, Whitt made a cold call to the late Kevin Koenig, founder of Water Bed City, now the City Furniture Inc. retail chain (based in Tamarac). He was not able to secure business with Koenig, but the two remained in touch.

When Hurricane Andrew came through in 1992, Water Bed City’s business exploded. The company also changed its name to City Furniture, and had to manage a far larger inventory. Koenig was ready to install Whitt’s product. For the next three months, Whitt and contractor Juan Lopez worked at the furniture retailer’s headquarters, building the software from scratch to take advantage of wireless technology. “It was something nobody had done up to that point,” Whitt says. City Furniture still uses [TopShelf®](#) to track its warehouse inventory, and Lopez (whom Koenig and Whitt eventually hired together) is now vice president of management information systems at City Furniture.



To date, Whitt has sold about 300 copies of the software. He says between 30 and 50 are currently live — including clients such as British Airways Plc, Royal Caribbean Cruises Ltd. and Miami-Dade County (which uses the software to track inventory for its Water and Sewer Department storerooms). [TopShelf®](#)’s most basic version can cost as little as \$20,000, but its most popular configurations sell for around \$60,000 to \$80,000, Whitt says. He adds that Wireless Data Systems competes with companies whose systems typically start at \$150,000 and approach \$200,000 or more.

In the next five to 10 years, he expects the company to be a 50-person operation with coverage targeting major cities such as Chicago and Los Angeles, where there is a concentration of supply chain logistics operations. Whitt, however, is in no rush to make the leap. “I am not interested in it happening until I am sure we could maintain the quality,” he says.