

Conducting a DSD Assessment for a Food Company

A nationally recognized food manufacturer partnered with Clarkston to modernize its legacy Direct Store Delivery (DSD) model. The client's distribution strategy depended on a network of frontline sales and delivery partners to manage retail merchandising and replenishment.

Over time, the model had become fragmented, impacted by performance variability, increased service costs, and limited real-time visibility. Facing rising competitive pressures and evolving retail dynamics, the client sought to enhance execution, improve visibility, and enable scalable growth through a modernized DSD framework.

Clarkston performed a cross-functional assessment of the client's DSD operations, applying a people, process, data, and technology lens to diagnose current-state challenges and build a future-ready strategy. Key focus areas included:

- Benchmarking DSD capabilities & metrics against peer CPG leaders
- Conducting field diagnostics and stakeholder interviews across DSD operations
- Performing maturity assessment and gap analysis across key DSD capabilities, e.g., Route Optimization, Route Inventory Management, Promotion Management, Store Task Optimization, Field Sales Execution, Store Order Management, Technology, KPIs and Analytics, etc.
- Facilitating executive workshops to define a transformation vision for future state DSD strategy
- Delivering an actionable DSD optimization roadmap and foundational performance frameworks

Consumer Products Case Study

PROJECT OVERVIEW

INDUSTRY:



Consumer Products—
Food and Beverage

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES:



Food Manufacturer and
Distributor

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES:

- Assess current state and diagnose gaps in capabilities across the DSD operating model, including route optimization, field execution, and inventory management and settlement
- Evaluate DSD maturity across people, process, technology, and data using Clarkston’s proprietary DSD Maturity Model
- Define future-state design principles and deliver a scalable framework to enhance DSD execution, visibility, and accountability
- Deliver a phased, actionable roadmap to drive continuous improvement and digital transformation across key DSD operations

RESOLUTION:

- Led a comprehensive evaluation and strategy development process
- Conducted 15 in-depth interviews across business units to understand operational realities and cross-functional perspectives
- Performed field assessments through site visits to DSD distribution centers and ride-alongs with DSD team to capture frontline insights
- Compared client performance to peer benchmarks and industry best practices to contextualize findings and highlight competitive gaps
- Assessed the maturity of current DSD capabilities, including warehousing, management practices, DSD network effectiveness, and enabling technologies, to identify key opportunities for optimization
- Facilitated a future-state strategy session with executives and business leaders to align on long-term goals and transformation priorities
- Assessed DSD go-to-market strategies and implications across different market maturity levels
- Developed pilot implementation plans for high-impact initiatives across frontline management
- Delivered a prioritized, actionable roadmap and a cohesive set of recommendations to guide the client’s multi-year DSD optimization strategy

KEY BENEFITS:

- Alignment on executive vision for DSD transformation
- Clear identification of performance and capability gaps
- Custom frameworks to support frontline accountability and route optimization
- Defined KPIs and benchmarking standards for sustained improvements
- Phased roadmap balancing short-term wins with long-term initiatives



KPIs

- 15+ stakeholder interviews conducted
- 50+ documents and data sets analyzed
- Site visits and field diagnostics across multiple U.S. regions
- Assessed and benchmarked key DSD metrics, i.e., Weekly Sales per Route, Average Store Drop Size (\$) and Store Visit Frequency
- Strengths and opportunities in DSD model identified related to: Analytics and Reporting, Settlements, Invoicing, Route Optimization, Ordering and Inventory Management, and Store Task Optimization and Technology

“When we began, it felt like we are just scratching the surface. However, as we went through this process, I noticed I started getting a clearer view of everything we have to get done. We have tons of potential, and this process helped us to hear the success points and align on the future.”

CONTACT US

