

WM's round up of the latest news and applications showcasing storage solutions and technology in action

# North-south divide pays off

Through a supply chain initiative dubbed 'Network of the Future', tissue and toilet paper manufacturer Kimberly-Clark is committed to reducing complexity in its European distribution network to improve service levels, take vehicles off the road and reduce carbon emissions.



As part of this commitment, in partnership with Norbert Dentressangle, the company has established two automated warehouse operations in the UK, located in the north and south, to serve its retail and wholesale customers.

Following a fire at its former warehouse, Kimberly-Clark commissioned a new 160,000 sq ft, 34 m high automated warehouse in Northfleet, Kent. The 60,000 pallet space facility is fitted with double deep racking to 18 pallets high and is served by seven cranes using 196 m of track.

A joint Kimberly-Clark/Norbert Dentressangle project team was responsible for the specification and implementation of the new solution, which was successfully completed on time and within budget.

In May this year, Kimberly-Clark opened a second automated warehouse at Chorley in Lancashire, effectively consolidating the activities of five smaller warehouses in the North West.

Unlike Northfleet however, the Chorley operation occupies an existing, 311,000 sq ft, 15 m high warehouse, so Kimberly-Clark worked with Norbert Dentressangle to design and implement an automated system which was viable within a traditional low-bay warehouse. Pallet capacity in the warehouse was increased by 25%

by replacing traditional pallet racking with high-density, ASRS drive-in racking

Kimberly-Clark's European supply chain director, Peter Surtees said: "While the capacity of our two RDCs is exactly the same, the two sites are very different and we have worked closely with Norbert Dentressangle to identify and implement different solutions to ensure maximum efficiency and space utilisation in each location.

"In both cases, the implementation of an automated warehousing solution has enabled us to rationalise our warehouse footprint and allows us to ship product straight into our RDCs for delivery to the customer, without the need for intermediate storage. This has eliminated spurious vehicle movements, delivering both efficiency and environmental benefits.

"Having a single stockholding for the north and the south has also improved product availability in line with our commitment to service excellence."

## Pick and mix for top technology payback

When it comes to automating processes in the warehouse, manufacturers should choose carefully to ensure maximum return on investment.

That's the advice from Jez Tongue (pictured) of warehouse management system provider @logistics Reply.



The following warehouse processes, says Tongue, give the best ROI when automated.

- Inbound checking: partial or even 100% quality or sample checking, with percentage cases or items to be checked set by the supplier. Trusted suppliers have a lower percentage than newer, seemingly less reliable, suppliers, which drives supplier KPIs
- Cycle-counting/stock checking: perpetual inventory activities built into picking operations (RF or voice), which confirm remaining quantity or confirm empty after a picking task, can drive savings. This needs to be balanced against overall picking productivity.
- Replenishment of pick faces: based on a percentage threshold of inventory remaining in the picking location, with an automatic priority increase of the replenishment task while it remains unfulfilled. This helps prevent stockouts and the picker having to skip or miss picks, especially effective where palletisation or pallet build is important (such as with crushable items, picking heavy-to-light)
- Picking: hands-free picking with voice technology can deliver significant productivity gains (over RF-based picking) and add data integrity and accuracy benefits over paper-based 'pick and tick'.

## Automation lifeline for medical equipment manufacturer

Medical equipment manufacturer ERBE is using a new warehouse management solution to map its materials handling processes, from goods receipt to product storage, and from picking to packing, including preparation of all freight documentation.

ERBE services its global market from a sole production facility in Tübingen, Germany. A strong growth in exports (now at 80%) meant it needed a new logistics operation to cope with the differing demands.

A new 38,000 m<sup>2</sup> logistics centre has been built and accommodates: small parts storage, where up to 260 parts per hour can be picked; high-rack



storage area with wire-guided narrow aisle turret trucks; plus areas for storing hazardous materials and sterile goods.

The operation is managed with the help of ASSIST4, a warehouse management system from AEB International. For ERBE,

standardisation and automation were key requirements when planning the new system, and the implementation enables product scanning with online link to the central management system, an interface to ERBE's ERP system, electronic processing of all shipping documents, and online transmission of import and export declarations to customs authorities.

Key features include both a laser-guided display and a monitor display to facilitate stock putaway and removal in the automatic small-parts storage area. A laser beam points to the tray segment from which the goods are to be removed.