

I.T.

Software solution digitises supply chain orders

A new software service by a digital supply chain specialist in the South is set to transform the way supply chains process manual orders from customers.

Award-winning Transalis provides cloud-based applications for 5,000 users across 32 countries, transacting £3 billion worth of invoices per annum.

As part of its latest automation offering to retailers, manufacturers, logistics, warehouses and supply chain firms, the business has launched its DataCapture solution.

The real-time 24/7 order automation service captures and harnesses data from other documents as well as orders, including dispatch notes, invoices and stock inventories.

A personal care products company has already saved 10 working days a month in labour through DataCapture.

"Our business tool is a potential game-changer for supply chains in Great Britain and internationally," said Mark McGarry, a senior account director at Portsmouth-based Transalis who leads DataCapture.

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5 Factors affecting the Warehouse of the Future

The pace of change in warehousing and logistics has never been faster. Technology, macro economic conditions and changing consumer behaviour, are having a huge impact on the way warehouses and distribution centres are being designed and operated. Here are 5 of the most significant ones we encounter as WMS specialists.

Location is not always important

It used to be the case that the Midlands/Northampton area was the ideal location for a warehouse, but that's becoming less important. In the future, a central location won't be as necessary, provided you have a DC process that fulfils the ecommerce model and easy access to appropriate transport links. In many cases, logistics operations will be fulfilled using a pallet or parcel network, which makes a central location less important. For instance, we've been working with a company that has a central DC in Fareham. It has proved an ideal location and they work with pallet networks and couriers to obtain UK wide coverage.

Brexit will have a significant impact on labour costs

Whatever your political views, Brexit is having an impact on the logistics industry. The UK now has an ever-decreasing pool of skilled warehousing labour and that labour force also no longer regards the UK as their preferred choice of a country in which to live and work. This change is partly due to the reduced value of the pound, but in addition, the negative publicity surrounding immigration. Many warehouses are already seeing the impact of wage inflation as a result of the shrinking labour pool. Management will need to identify a way to work more efficiently and limit exposure to increasing labour costs.

Buildings are getting taller

There is a definite trend towards having larger, taller warehouse buildings and this will continue as property costs continue to increase. Although for larger operators where centralisation is important, taller warehouses bring operational advantages, most SMEs don't need a DC on that scale and it brings with it a temptation to hold too much stock.

For many e-commerce businesses, inventory is being pushed back up the supply chain and if you are a distributor, it's good business practice to avoid holding large amounts of stock. It is estimated that holding £1m in stock over a year creates over £150K in servicing costs. Inventory is the biggest single cost for a business, so holding greater volumes simply because there is available space isn't commercially sensible. Having a taller DC able to hold more stock contradicts the wisdom of minimising the amount of stock being held in order to be as efficient as possible.

Increasing energy costs requires more focus on sustainability

All companies are keen to improve their environmental performance as much as possible but a totally zero carbon DC is very difficult to achieve in practice. To put this into perspective, the amount of CO2 generated when creating a 1m² area of concrete is nearly 160kg and many new warehouses will be 1km² in area. Companies that have environmental credentials at the heart of their brand decision making will want to make the investments needed to swap steel for wood and have a living roof for example, but the vast majority won't see the value in going to these lengths.

IT systems are more important than ever

In any new build warehouse, it would be a tragedy not to embrace the opportunity to introduce some form of data capture and WMS capability from the outset and yet the sad reality is a lot of companies will still do this, as I experienced very recently on a site visit.

IT needs to be at the centre of all the decision making in a business because this is the best way to identify a great process. Amazon is a classic example - they took years to make any profit but now, as a result of all that effort into IT and infrastructure 15 years ago, it's gravy every month!



The same applies to automation and robotics. Retrofitting automation into an existing infrastructure and legacy equipment is very difficult and always means a compromise. Companies implementing automation will be looking to have specially adapted, purpose built warehouses, with technology placed at the centre of the decision making process.

Author Eric Carter, Solutions Architect at Indigo Software.

INDIGO SOFTWARE

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AUTOMATION

AMHSA: huge demand for automation



At the recent AGM of the Automated Material Handling Systems Association (AMHSA), members reported very high levels of interest in warehouse automation.

Held at AMHSA's headquarters in Market Harborough on 25th April, the AGM was well attended and reflected the buoyant mood in the automated handling sector.

Training

The activities of the association throughout the past year have centred around AMHSA's 'four pillars': training, quality, networking and promotion. The training provided to members has included workshops on Social Media, the legal aspects of MF1, Brexit and GDPR, as well as sessions providing an introduction to logistics automation.

Forthcoming events include sessions on Sorting, Weighing, Labelling and Vision systems; Robotic Picking; and Shuttle Systems. In addition, an event on Returnable Transit Packaging in Automated Handling Systems will be held at Schoeller Alibert's factory in Winsford on 18th July. Any designers, engineers, project managers and technical sales staff wishing to attend this event should register via the AMHSA website.

Apprenticeships

AMHSA's apprenticeship programme continues to go from strength to strength. Operated in association with car manufacturer, Toyota, the scheme enables AMHSA members' apprentices to take part in a four-year programme. This begins with two years of learning hands-on, high-tech engineering skills at the Toyota Academy in Burnaston, Derbyshire, and then progresses to the apprentices building on this with industry-specific skills and knowledge at the premises of the member company.



Meet the Experts at IMHX 2019

AMHSA's popular 'Meet the Experts' seminar programme will once again be held at IMHX when the show returns to the NEC from 24th to 27th September next year. Taking place in the AMHSA Pavilion in Hall 10, these informative presentations will cover a wide range of topics of interest to those considering or using logistics automation.

For information on membership, please call Matthew Jones on 01858 414229 or visit the AMHSA website at www.amhsa.co.uk

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