

PRESS INFORMATION

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DOUBLE DEEP FOR DELAMODE WITH ATLET

International logistics specialist Delamode has upgraded its distribution warehouse in Braintree by converting it to double deep racking served by Atlet reach trucks. This will enable Delamode to store more pallets in the same space while implementing new value added services for its increasingly varied customer base.

“Double deep makes good use of the space and allows us to use other areas of the warehouse for new services that form part of our total international logistics capability,” says Shaun Godfrey, Managing Director at Delamode. “Atlet gave advice and presented alternatives at every stage to help us achieve our objectives.”

Delamode has come a long way since starting as a freight forwarder with specialism in the fashion industry during the early 1990s. The company was one of the first in the UK to see the potential for growth into Eastern Europe and has steadily built up a complete logistics operation that now includes facilities in Romania, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldavia, Bulgaria, Serbia & Hong Kong and many other countries where Delamode is supported by overseas agents. Its air, sea and road transport capabilities also extend to the Far East. Many employees at Braintree are natives of the various countries where the company operates, enabling it to offer a highly personalised service to customers. Computerised systems help Delamode to provide rapid quotations for its services. The range of industries covered has also grown although fashion and clothing remains a major part of the business.

Delamode built its current distribution warehouse in Braintree in 2006 on the advice of one of its principal investors, with the aim of raising its profile and expanding its operations and capabilities. Maximising storage potential was a priority and the company originally specified very narrow aisle (VNA) racking served by specialist warehouse trucks.

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However, it soon became apparent that to meet the rapidly evolving demands of its customers and provide a wider range of logistics services Delamode would need to look at new ways of maximising the utilisation of the whole building.

“This was our first distribution warehouse and we were inexperienced and not fully aware of all of the alternatives,” says Shaun Godfrey. “VNA seemed like the right choice at the time but from the start it was clear that it was slow and cumbersome for our type of operation.”

An encounter with an Atlet representative at a business networking event led Shaun Godfrey to discover more about the potential benefits of double deep racking. Atlet has long term experience with the concept and has worked successfully with many customers in the UK. The potential benefits were also endorsed by an independent consultant engineer engaged by Delamode.

The result was that Delamode decided to configure the second phase of its warehouse development to double deep and, later, to reverse engineer most of the original racking as well. Overall capacity in the warehouse will have been increased by 1000 pallets from 9000 to 10000 by January 2009. The changes have also allowed Delamode to install a 20,000ft² mezzanine area at the front of the warehouse that will offer a new pick and pack facility to customers in the same timeframe. The area beneath will continue to be used for order assembly and despatch operations.

“Mezzanine floors are a good use of space, particularly above the intake and dispatch area and keep processing tasks away from storage areas,” says Shaun Godfrey.

Double deep is designed to maximise pallet storage space through the installation of two rows of racking down each side of the aisle. The rear pallet locations are accessed using reach trucks equipped with forks that extend into the racking to place and retrieve the load. Overall storage density is increased because there are in effect twice as many rows of racking as there are aisles. In conventional warehouses the ratio is one-to-one and proportionately more floor space is occupied by aisles.

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The switch to double deep meant that new lift trucks were required. Atlet showed Delamode around three reference sites in the region and recommended its Forte UHST reach truck. Delamode chose three of the advanced trucks, two configured to handle full pallets to the maximum height of 11.0m in the warehouse and one configured for 9.0m operations. These trucks incorporate the Atlet S3 Stability Support System that automatically provides higher truck stability by governing speed and acceleration, and the interface between speed and steering sensitivity. S3 automatically reduces the speed of truck functions in proportion to the height lifted, overrides unsafe manoeuvres and reduces jerkiness in the manipulation of the controls, a factor that complements the smoothly-damped mast.

“With Atlet there is a customer service approach and although the trucks are slightly higher in price they have higher residuals,” says Shaun Godfrey. “We saw three reference sites and didn’t hear anything bad about them. The salesman was very professional.”

Atlet supplied the trucks with cameras mounted on the fork carriage so that drivers can see the load and racking on a screen inside the cab. This helps promote confident handling, especially when working in rear pallet positions at elevated levels.

Atlet provided advice on the reconfiguration of the warehouse and worked with Delamode to manage the transformation which included some repositioning of existing racking and installation of new equipment. Even with the slight widening of the aisles that was needed double deep on its own would have increased capacity. But even more locations were possible because the new trucks require less turning space, which allowed longer aisles, and a racking bridge was added to the transit aisle to use free space overhead.

“Double deep makes for good use of space and the wider aisles allow us to do more things when picking and assembled orders,” says Shaun Godfrey. “We are very happy with it.”

In some operations load selectivity can limit the effectiveness of double deep but not in this warehouse where the benefits of increased storage generally outweigh other considerations. Careful stock management using WMS and hand-held terminals helps ensure pallets are allocated to specific positions to minimise selectivity issues, for example by placing identical stock in the front and rear locations. A small section of single deep racking has been retained to support customers with first-in, first-out stock requirements.

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Delamode's clients include an electronics manufacturer and a toy supplier as well as some long term fashion businesses. Operations are split between bulk storage for some clients and full logistics operations for others. Flexibility to adapt and meet customer expectations is key. The company takes in around 25 containers a week from the Far East for warehousing and distribution. Loads are often loose and need to be decanted and palletised before being placed in the client's designated area of the warehouse using the reach trucks. Ground level locations are normally reserved for general cargo and groupage handled on behalf of a wide range of customers. The company estimates that it has around 6000 groupage consignments coming in and out of the warehouse every month, to service the consolidation part of the business. The core business is still very much international based.

"As a relatively small warehouse we need to keep the trucks up and running," says Shaun Godfrey. "Atlet has a good reputation for responses and services the trucks on a call-out basis which is working well for us."

When the transformation of the warehouse is complete at the end of 2008 Delamode will be running at over 85% per cent capacity with the ability to deliver a full supply chain solution with in-country support across its principal markets. The company has already won new business as a result.

"We have been through some big changes transforming from a freight forwarder to logistics provider with our own warehouse and we now have the facility to offer a full range of services," says Shaun Godfrey. "We have learnt a lot in two years."

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For product information contact:
Paul Forster
Atlet Limited
Tel: 01844 215501
Fax: 01844 219220
www.atlet.co.uk

Press enquiries to:
Sue Malleson
Taurus Public Relations
Tel: 01908 265774
atlet@tauruspr.co.uk