

PRESS INFORMATION

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FLEXPAC PACKS DOUBLE-DEEP WITH ATLET

Contract packing specialist Flexpac called upon Atlet to help optimise performance and efficiency in its new warehouse. By specifying a mixture of single and double-deep racking served by an Atlet ATF ride-on extending fork reach truck, the warehouse design and layout offers the right combination of storage capacity, load selectivity and throughput to support Flexpac's successful and growing business.

"We were picking a warehouse solution and a lift truck to work it," says Andrew Holmes, managing director at Flexpac. "You rely on the experts to give you what you need. We said this is what we want to do, now find us a truck and Atlet offered the best for our requirement."

With a heritage going back over 80 years Flexpac has specialised in contract packing for a diverse range of clients since the mid-1980s. The company has a number of customers in the fast-moving consumer goods and toiletries sectors for whom it packs promotional, gift and retail transit items needed to support marketing and advertising campaigns. Flexpac was based in North London for many years but relocated to Iver, conveniently close to the motorway network, in 2007 when it had outgrown its previous site.

The new warehouse was an empty shell and this allowed the business to devise a materials handling operation matched to its specific requirement. For many of its larger customers Flexpac works in batches using items supplied in multiple palletised loads. The aim is to hold stock for as short a time as possible and the main requirement, from a storage and handling perspective, is to ensure enough items can be held on site to maintain throughput and meet delivery schedules.

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Flexpac approached a number of potential lift truck suppliers for their suggestions on warehouse configuration. Atlet proposed a combination of single and double-deep racking which led to 756 pallet locations on four levels arranged along three aisles. An aisle along one side of the warehouse is completely double deep, a central aisle has double deep racking down one side and single-deep down the other and the third aisle is single-deep only. Duplicate bulk loads are generally stored in the double deep areas while individual pallets and items that need to be accessed more often are kept in the single-deep sections.

“We wanted to design the racking to utilise the maximum space. Atlet was the only supplier to suggest double deep,” says Andrew Holmes. “If you’re dealing with lots of different products you wouldn’t necessarily go for double deep but many of our pallets are the same, so this combination works well.”

With double-deep, two rows of racking are built along the side of the aisle and pallets placed one behind the other. This helps maximise utilisation of available space and is especially useful when the pallets contain identical products and there are no issues with load selectivity and no requirement for strict stock rotation. Going completely double-deep and keeping aisle width to the minimum would have allowed Flexpac to store even more pallets in the warehouse. But retaining some single-deep racking and widening the aisle slightly provides better load flexibility and helps optimise throughput during peak periods.

The racking is located at the rear of the building with a marshalling area in front and a mezzanine along one side of the warehouse. This provides space for the main activities of packing and preparation at ground and first floor level. In this type of warehouse pallets are handled using a special type of reach truck with extending forks that can access the rearmost rows of racking. Atlet suggested its compact ATF extending fork reach truck. The choice of the stand-on version made sense in this situation because operators need to get on and off relatively frequently which would be less convenient on a seated variant. The truck is typically used sporadically to move pallets between storage and packing areas, so ease and speed of access are more important and help to promote productivity.

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Like any single-truck operation one of the biggest fears is downtime. There is some seasonality in the business with the busiest period coming in late summer as customers prepare stock for delivery in time for their Christmas and New Year promotions. This means that the truck can be used much more heavily between August and October. The truck's on-board diagnostic computer helps engineers to anticipate any issues before they impact on truck performance. Atlet provides call-out service support and completes a six-monthly routine maintenance check.

The wider aisles in the single-deep area of the warehouse allow the company's counterbalance truck, normally used in the marshalling area and to load and unload transport vehicles, to act as a second handling option during busy periods and as a backup for the reach truck. Even so, in the two years since the Atlet truck was delivered there has not been a problem.

"If you ask me if I would do the same again I would say yes," says Andrew Holmes. "The truck has behaved well."

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