

PRESS INFORMATION

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ATLET'S IN THE PINK AND BLUE AT KIDDICARE

Lifetime costs and the quality of truck performance and support convinced baby supplier Kiddicare to pick Atlet trucks for its rapidly growing single-site warehousing and retail operations. All the trucks are finished in Kiddicare's distinctive blue and pink livery. Atlet supplied three advanced Forte UHS reach trucks to operate in double-deep racking areas and four Presto PLP pallet transporters configured as mobile picking stations.

"We liked Atlet's approach," says Steve Poulter, Kiddicare's general manager. "They provided the best package in terms of truck performance, life-time costs and support."

Kiddicare has grown to be the largest privately owned nursery and baby supplier in the UK since it was founded in Peterborough in 1974. The business expanded dramatically following the launch of its successful website and had outgrown its existing facilities. In 2008 Kiddicare consolidated operations into a purpose-built 27,900 sq metre (300,000sq foot) integrated distribution warehouse and retail showroom, a unique concept in the nursery and baby retail sector. The showroom is the largest of its type in Europe, covering 5575 sq metres (60,000 sq foot) on three floors and stocking thousands of different lines.

"Our existing warehouse was fragmented and old fashioned with block stacked pallets and no proper use of space," says Steve Poulter. "Here the aim is to utilise all the available space, have everything under one roof and keep things very simple."

Every aspect of the operation has been designed from the ground up to support stock availability and high throughputs. Many of Kiddicare's fastest moving lines are supplied from manufacturers in the UK and overseas in containerised shipments with pallets often holding identical products. Kiddicare recognised that double-deep storage to the full 11m height of the warehouse would allow it to maximise capacity without unduly compromising its ability to access items.

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“Double deep is ideal for high volumes of fast moving stock and now we can hold so much more,” says Steve Poulter. “But it’s also very easy to run a pick and pack operation here because of the way we’re organised.”

The company approached a number of warehouse truck manufacturers for advice and recommendations. Atlet proposed three of its advanced Forte UHS reach trucks configured for double deep pallet handling and four Presto PLP stand-on powered pallet transporters.

“We looked at a number of truck manufacturers,” says Jo Wright, Kiddicare’s partner with responsibility for procurement. “The Atlet trucks looked good and we visited a number of reference sites to get feedback from drivers, who told us they liked them. We saw that the trucks were very reliable and had the facility to work double-deep to the full height in our warehouse. When Atlet told us we could have them in our own colours it showed they took a real interest in our business.”

The double-deep section of the warehouse runs along five aisles accommodating 3336 pallet locations. The racking is organised into zones, by supplier, for simplicity. The reach trucks are used for putaway, pull down, replenishment and other handling tasks. One of these is to move isolated and small groups of pallets into spare locations to free up contiguous space along an aisle so that the full contents of an incoming container can be stored together.

“This was a new type of warehouse for us and Atlet provided lots of advice,” says Steve Poulter.

The double-deep section occupies the largest proportion of the warehouse. Other sections, known collectively as “the tower”, provide 1216 picking points in high density shelving for small packs, live roller-beds for larger items such as prams and pushchairs, and an area at ground level with conventional racking for furniture and other bulky products. A conveyor system runs around the tower’s perimeter and transfers orders to a consolidation area where they are prepared for delivery. No single item weighs more than 30kg and everything is designed to ensure Kiddicare can meet its next day delivery targets for any item ordered before 5pm. The company is currently despatching around 1500 orders a day, well up from the 300 that was the norm just a couple of years ago.

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Larger items are picked at ground level using one of four Atlet PLP ride-on powered pallet transporters. These have been equipped with a barcode scanner and printer which allows operators to verify and label an item as it is picked before transferring it to the despatch area.

Each of the operators has a designated truck and this encourages them to look after it. They can take full advantage of ergonomic design features to set up the reach truck as they want, for example adjusting the position of the seat, arm support and head rest for comfortable and efficient working. This is an important feature as the trucks are used from 8am to 6.30pm each day. The operators also like the camera mounted on the fork carriage which allows them to see the racking and load on a screen on their consoles when handling pallets at the full height.

“These are fantastic bits of kit and we wouldn't change them,” says Steve Poulter. “We like good quality and things to look modern.”

Atlet provided operator training. Regular routine maintenance visits by locally-based engineers are complemented by a same-day call-out service. The company provides Kiddicare with regular reports on truck maintenance, reliability and performance.

“We need to keep running but if a truck is down someone will be here within the hour,” says Steve Poulter “All-in-all we've had no problems and the trucks have been reliable.”

Kiddicare has invested in the equipment, technology and processes to support and drive business growth. Stock control used to be paper-based but is now fully computerised and integrated across the whole business with a resultant improvement in performance. For example, customers in the showroom can order any item from a cash desk or one of the self-service kiosks located in the various areas. They can choose to take items with them or have them delivered to their homes. Either way, the cash desk and kiosks are linked directly to the back office and warehouse systems to ensure a seamless and instantaneous transfer of information. Items selected by customers to take away are prioritised and picked directly to a special collection zone on the showroom.

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Deliveries are designed to work around the needs of mothers with young children. The company currently stocks around 5000 SKUs but expects this to rise to over 6000 in the next year or so as the baby retail sector continues to grow. Kiddicare already achieves near 100 per cent customer satisfaction ratings but is always aiming to improve. Track-and-trace technology enables one hour delivery slots to be offered to customers. The company's systems provide a huge amount of data on internal performance, such as pick rates, fulfilment levels and returns. But it also focuses on information about, and feedback from, customers so that it can target actions where they have the biggest impact.

"We've put in a huge amount of time and investment to take the business forward and we are expanding and volumes are increasing," says Steve Poulter. "We always look to build close relationships with suppliers but we won't tolerate poor performance. Atlet had the answers and solutions to help us grow."

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