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FORTY YEARS ON

S & L UNITED STORAGE SYSTEMS LTD CELEBRATES



From Little Acorns Great Oak Trees Grow!

Forty years ago two young salesmen met in a pub in Epping, Essex and formed an agreement to start their own racking company. Little would they know at that time that a long journey was just starting as S & L United Storage Systems Ltd was born. United Storage commenced trading on the 7th of July 1977 (the seventh of the seventh seventy-seven). The first order received back in July 1977 was for £2,814 for shelving in a

chemical warehouse. When this article was written the latest order received was for £281,400 for longspan shelving on a two tier 4800m2 mezzanine floor, already sold by United Storage to the client two months ago, in a clothing warehouse. The latest order being 100 times the first order is a reflection on the success and growth of the company.

United Storage commenced trading, as many companies do, from the spare bedroom of Vik Smith's house in Harlow, Essex. At that time there was

no knowing where the company would go. At the start the product lines were racking and shelving systems, with a main customer base in North London, East London, Essex and East Anglia.

The ambitious nature of the founding shareholders and directors was soon apparent when they took on their first employee, Piers Beszant, in September 1977 as a salesman. Piers is still with the group as Managing Director of Uni-Shop (Pitting) Ltd, the group's shop equipment company.

Continues on page 8

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INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

SEMA IOSH

Robot joins picking line-up at Novaltia

Pharmaceutical wholesaler, Novaltia, recently added further automation – including a robotic picking system – to the warehouse solution supplied by KNAPP.

A variety of picking methods
An automated central belt picking system – comprising four A-frame autopickers that are connected in series and

fast- and medium-moving articles. Medium- and slow-movers are stored in the OSR Shuttle™ storage system and supplied to one of two ergonomically designed Pick-it-Easy Health workstations that feature pick-to-light technology. Oversized and fragile items are either picked at manual workstations or directly from pallets with the aid of RF terminals, while homeopathic articles are picked from a vertical carousel. The various warehouse areas are connected by a high-performance conveyor system and KNAPP's KiSoft software plans all the order picking and controls the various fulfilment systems.

Shuttle™ store. It uses KNAPP's KiSoft Vision image recognition technology to identify the optimum article to pick from a tote and calculate the ideal grip point. Combining flexibility, reliability and performance, the robot is able to maintain a consistently high throughput rate and accuracy level over long periods.

shapes and sizes are picked using a system of two grippers that can move independently of each other. Novaltia is using KNAPP-Store for returns, slow-moving products and articles that are subject to stringent legal regulations, such as narcotics. Once loaded into the KNAPP-Store, the articles are immediately available for picking.

alternative routes. The Open Shuttle at Novaltia is used to transport returns to the KNAPP-Store, thereby flexibly linking the storage areas.

Quality assurance

In a final checking process at the Zaragoza DC, the contents of picked totes are verified semi-automatically with the aid of a check station. If an error is detected or there are any missing articles, the operator triggers a re-picking order and these items are picked using RF terminals and transferred to the final check station. After fully automatic insertion of delivery notes, lidding and strapping, the totes are distributed among the 720 dispatch ramps, according to the allocated delivery routes.

Open Shuttle transport

The recent upgrade of Novaltia's Zaragoza warehouse also included the addition of an Open Shuttle, one of KNAPP's intelligent and free-roaming automated guided vehicles. Open Shuttles can manoeuvre without optical or physical aids, reacting dynamically to obstacles and planning



KNAPP's Pick-it-Easy Robot.

Robotic picking

The new Pick-it-Easy Robot system is also fed by the OSR

feature different ejector types to suit various products – takes care of the picking of



A-frame autopickers.



Novaltia's distribution centre in Zaragoza, Spain.

From its 18,500m2 distribution centre in Zaragoza, Spain, Novaltia ships up to 120,000 items a day. All four of the company's DCs feature automated handling systems and together supply 1,000 pharmacies with up to five deliveries per day. Novaltia has worked with automation provider, KNAPP, since 1999 and the Zaragoza DC underwent a large-scale extension and modernization programme in 2008. Recently, Novaltia added three further KNAPP technologies to the site: Pick-it-Easy Robot, KNAPP-Store and Open Shuttles.

Handling returns

Also added to the site recently is KNAPP-Store, a robotic storage and picking solution based on an AS/RS concept. Modular in design, it features rail-mounted storage robots that are like mini cranes. Goods are not stored in bins but multi-deep directly on glass shelves. On entry to the system, products are scanned from six sides – capturing key data such as expiry date and lot number – and then automatically stored. Products of various



An Open Shuttle transports returns to the KNAPP-Store.

Automation means speed

With highly efficient automated storage and picking, the average order processing time at the Zaragoza DC is just 15 minutes and the delivery time for orders is between 30 and 180 minutes. The secret of this success is selection of the optimum picking technology for each of the 33,000 articles in Novaltia's product range.

KNAPP

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ergonomic
order
picking

making complexity simple

KNAPP is a leading global supplier of warehouse automation solutions, with over 1700 active systems worldwide. The group's advanced conveying, storage and fulfilment technologies are combined in solutions that feature seamless integration and intelligent software. Successful projects in the UK recently include systems for John Lewis, Boots, M&S, Staples, Clarks, British Gas and Well.

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