



Press report

Less walking – more picks

An intelligent logistic concept together with BITO »MB« containers sized 800 x 600 mm help to shorten order picking routes at the HABA group

No matter whether customers ask for bathing towels, toys or furniture for children's rooms – the HABA product range covers everything children and young families might need. And what is more: every order is delivered within a few days. In order to keep order processing time as short as possible, HABA has adopted a new logistic concept as of this year: A high degree of automation, IT-monitoring of all procedures and modern conveyor technology ensure fast order picking. In order to improve in-house transport efficiency, BITO-Lagertechnik Bittmann GmbH supplied 1000 extra large multi-purpose containers of their »MB« range.

The HABA group with their headquarters at Bad Rodach in Upper Franconia, Germany, manufacture high-quality toys from wood and furniture appropriate for children and distribute their products under the brand name HABA with specialised traders such as toy shops or department stores. Moreover, the distributors JAKO-O and Wehrfritz joined the company group in 1998. In the beginning of 2005, HABA broadened their product range and launched two new catalogues: FIT-Z which offers fashion and leisure time products for teenagers. Parents will find everything that has to do with home design and decoration, recreation and fashion for women in the catalogue Qiéro! All in all, the product management system has to deal with more than 20000 different lines.

The widened product range made it necessary to restructure logistic operations at the company location in Bad Rodach. For this reason, the order picking warehouses of all distribution sectors of the HABA group were centralised into one location. Today, the order picking area stretches over two floors – orders are picked into containers which are transported on picking trolleys. The third floor is used for packing and dispatch. In order to avoid that containers with completed orders accumulate at the packing stations, a buffer area was established for JAKO-O products. The hall on the third floor was just ideal for this purpose: on account of the room height, it was possible to build a huge mezzanine floor on top of the packing stations and to use it as buffer store for completed orders until it was their turn to be packed. A conveyor system automatically transports the containers from floor to floor and from one station to the next by a simple mouse click.

One container – three applications: storage, order picking and transport

To feed the new facility, the company also needed new and above all, large order picking and transport containers. In the mail order distribution area, 60 orders are picked simultaneously into eight containers. For this procedure, the computer chooses 60 orders with the highest number of reference matches in the run-up. The aim is to reduce travel routes for order pickers to a minimum. For this reason, the containers have to accommodate as many items as possible at the same time. In addition, they need to be very robust, suitable for many applications and space-saving when empty. This is necessary for transport as well as for storage. All these requirements are met by BITO multi-purpose containers »MB«. HABA opted for the size 800 x 600 mm.

”BITO extra large »MB’s« have the best price/performance ratio and no other supplier provides nestable multi-purpose containers of this size”, explains Bernd Kleim, distribution and logistics manager of the HABA group. ”Moreover, BITO supplied the containers in our preferred colour red and also had a flexible approach to many other requests. For us, it was important to have our company name and scannable barcodes on every container.” It was no problem for BITO to apply our company name by hot stamping, and for barcodes, every container has a textured area which allows easy fixing and removal of labels. Another advantage of BITO containers is their smooth outside surface which makes it ideal for transport on conveyor systems as there is no risk that protruding container parts get stuck en route.

No idle time

All customers of the HABA group can benefit from almost round-the-clock ordering by calling the hotline number, by sending a fax, a mail or using the online service. The orders are fed into the central computer system which sorts the ordered items as to size and reference number. The order pickers work in a team with some team members working on the first floor and some on the second floor. Order picking is done with a picking trolley and BITO »MB’s«. The picking route is determined in line with the motto ”less walking – more picks”. As soon as a container is filled, it is placed onto the conveyor system and transported to the buffer area on top of the packing stations.

The container buffer zone consists of 52 roller conveyors, each providing enough place for eight containers which is sufficient for some 60 orders. In peak times, the roller conveyors can accommodate 416 containers which corresponds to some 3000 orders. The buffer zone is fully automated: the computer allocates incoming containers to the previously determined order groups and directs the containers to the right storage lane so that each lane provides containers pertaining to the same order.

As soon as a packing station operator needs new supply, he can order a new container per mouse click. Each packing station operator deals with 60 orders at a time. After a container has been fed out to an operator, the computer automatically orders a new container of the same order group into that lane. Kleim is enthusiastic about this efficient system: "There is no need to look for the right container. This saves a lot of time and our operators can fully concentrate on their task."

At present, the packing area has 24 packing stations. Every station is equipped with shelving with 60 cases and a mobile packing table. The operators deposit the items pertaining to the same order into a pre-determined comb. Upon order completion, the operators pack the goods, enclose an invoice and put an address label onto the parcel. The mobile packing tables allow to work close to the case in which all items of the order in question are collected. This also reduces travel time in the packing area and increases picking performance. As soon as a parcel is ready for dispatch, it is transported to the goods-out area.

Oriented towards the future

The facility has been put into operation in September. At present, the HABA group uses two thirds of the facility's capacity. Of the 1000 multi-purpose containers which can be accommodated by the facility, 500 are being used at the moment. However, Kleim knows that demand jumps up in peak times. In view of seasonal fluctuations, he ordered a system with sufficient capacity to handle huge picking quantities. Moreover, it is planned to expand the facility. "The test phase showed excellent results", he said. "For this reason, we envisage further enlargement in order to be prepared for many years to come and to have enough capacity to broaden our product range."



Bernd H. Kleim

Distribution and logistics manager at HABA



Order picking

"Less walking – more picks" is the motto for HABA order pickers who are equipped with picking trolleys and BITO »MB« containers sized 800 x 600 mm.



Buffer zone

52 roller conveyor lanes provide room for 416 containers which corresponds to some 3000 orders. Picked orders are buffered in this zone before packaging.



Convenient packing

Per mouse click, operators at the packaging station can order new supply from the buffer area. Each operator deals with 60 orders at a time and prepares them for dispatch.



Ready for dispatch

The conveyor system automatically transports filled containers to the packaging stations where all items pertaining to the same order are put into the pre-determined cases and are then packed.

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