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ROB MURPHY – HEAD OF OPERATIONS, HOMECRAFT ROLYAN

Apex's Storage Solution Increases Productivity by 40%

Homecraft Rolyan is the UK's leading distributor of daily living, therapy and paediatric products to the hospital, local authority and rehabilitation care markets.

The company is owned by Patterson Medical of Minneapolis, USA, the world's largest supplier of rehab medical supplies and non-wheelchair assistive products to healthcare professionals globally.

The Challenge

The sustained growth of Homecraft Rolyan in the UK market meant that the company outgrew its existing facilities in the Kirkby-in-Ashfield area of Nottingham. With ambitious plans to continue to improve customer service and to allow for future growth, Homecraft Rolyan has invested £7m in a new, 85,000 sq ft purpose-built headquarters in Huthwaite, Nottingham, combining offices with a distribution centre.

The new facility brings all of the five different Homecraft Rolyan sites under one roof, keeping control of transport costs and increasing the operational efficiency of the company.

The challenge for Rob Murphy, Head of Operations for Homecraft Rolyan, was to select a suitable storage partner to assist in the design of the distribution centre. The objective was to make the best use of the 65,000 sq ft to efficiently store and distribute the company's products to meet both existing and future market demands.

The Solution

Apex Linvar was one of a dozen companies that tendered for the business. Following visits to several reference sites and the company's headquarters and manufacturing plant in Milton Keynes, Rob Murphy awarded Apex the contract.

He comments "Seeing Apex's facilities and talking to their customers gave us confidence in them but it was their superb service right from the start that really made the difference between Apex and their competitors. They were by far the most proactive in presenting me with ideas for the internal design of the building filling the cube with absolutely no wasted space. The design process was a true partnership."

The final storage solution consists of a high density, three tiered shelving section of small, fast-pick products; Very Narrow Aisle (VNA) racking for bulk stockholding and some picking of larger goods; a pallet live section to

Left: VNA racking for bulk stockholding and selected picking of larger goods.

provide a marshalling area for palletised goods; Longspan shelving above the value added centre that acts as a sample store and Linspace work benches to provide a working area for customisation of products.

The Installation

The complex installation took place over a four week period and all suppliers had to comply with strict deadlines. Rob Murphy again, "During the installation we had lots of issues but not one of them was caused by Apex. They kept in constant communication with us and we felt very secure about their part of the process."

Bulk and back-up stock is stored in VNA racking which is built to follow the profile of the roof. There are up to 7 levels of 1.5m full pallet locations, rising to 12m in the highest section.

VNA trucks transport the pallets into the 6,500 pallet positions from a section of pallet live racking. This racking acts as a marshalling area between the goods arriving and being placed into store. Up to 300 pallets are delivered to the warehouse each day and loaded by forklift truck into the back of the live racking. The pallets roll to the front of the racking and are then ready for collection by the VNA trucks.

In total there are 10,000 locations in the three tier, small parts storage section of Longspan shelving. The structure is 40m long, with 150mm tolerance so there was very little room for error during the build procedure. At present, Homecraft Rolyan uses the first two tiers of the structure for storage with the third tier providing planned expansion.

The high density storage on the first two tiers utilises 10,000 Apex Materials Handling containers to safely house the products. Manual picking is done directly from these containers which have a durable backstop so that they can be pulled out for picking without the necessity to remove them completely. Apex also designed a U section channel which runs throughout the centre of the decked levels to prevent the containers being pushed through to the other side of the shelving.

Once the product has been picked it is sent down to the despatch area via a Dematic C-L 100 package conveyor. As this is the first conveyor of its type in the



Above: Longspan shelving – small parts storage



Right: Specially designed U section channel to constrain containers

world, it was vitally important that the physical integration was correct between the Apex storage solution and the new conveyor.

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The Result

"The new storage solution has enabled us to increase our pick rate by 40% after just six weeks and the plan is to double our efficiency over the next 18 months," concludes Murphy. "We have been exceptionally pleased with Apex's professional service not only throughout the project but also since as they continue to look after us in the same professional manner."



Above:

10,000 locations in three tier Longspan shelving.



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Left:

Marshalling area – pallet live racking.

