



CASE STUDY

FLEET DIVERSITY HELPS ACHIEVE GROWTH IN FURNITURE MANUFACTURE

Senator International designs, manufactures and distributes a wide range of Office Seating, Desking and related products. Steady year on year growth has meant that the company needs to make continual changes to its warehousing facilities to increase capacity. And it needed a materials handling partner that can think two steps ahead.

Briggs Equipment has a five-year relationship with Senator and has worked with the Furniture manufacturer to help cope with its ever-changing stock planning requirements by making adaptive changes to the warehouse fleet. High growth in demand for product lines has meant that additional storage capacity needed to be found quickly, and reactive changes in the short term have enabled Senator to maximise its use of existing premises.

Briggs worked with Senator in planning the layout of their warehouses, including advising on racking and aisle layout to maximise pallet spaces. Briggs then recommended a warehouse fleet that could handle the diversity of Senator's operations and, simultaneously achieve a significant increase in the number of pallet movements. For Senator, this meant moving from fork lift trucks to Caterpillar® man-up equipment and narrow aisle machines that work on rail or wire guided operation.

Senator has five sites across the North West operating a fleet of 41 machines. Two of these sites are located at Huncoat near Accrington and comprise a storage and distribution operation and a separate assembly site. A wide range of equipment operates in the 8m high warehouse which includes a mixture of Caterpillar® man-up equipment, high-level order pickers, pedestrian and ride on stackers, pallet trucks and Dambach wire-guided high rackers. Future expansion plans for an 11m facility meant that Briggs had to install machines that were capable of ultimately working to this increased height but could be safely operated at the current height of 8m.

To increase capacity at the Huncoat site Briggs worked with Senator to narrow the aisles from 2m to 1.1m and switched to a fleet that could work to higher heights in tighter aisles. Custom 4m masts were installed on the stacker trucks and reach trucks were replaced with high level order pickers. This has given Senator 890 extra spaces in the warehouse and has increased Senator's pallet movements by almost 100%.

A series of site surveys; an essential process for the ongoing changes to the warehouse and handling capacity, helped Briggs to plan a diverse fleet that has helped Senator maintain close to 90% capacity utilisation on racking space.

Mark McDonnell, Huncoat Stores Manager, explains: “ We have to constantly think ahead here. Our business changes week by week and Briggs have really helped us to accommodate this, planning not just for what we do today, but for what we will be doing in the future. It is like a game of chess, you are constantly having to think one step ahead to the next likely move. Briggs are flexible in accommodating our requirements and work in close partnership with us. They come in as and when we need them, often on a couple of hours’ notice and any issues are often resolved the next day.”

Sometimes simplicity brings the best results. For example, Senator created more pallet spaces on the bottom floor of the racking which are easily reached by pedestrian trucks. In lowering racking locations they are not only easier to pick from but enable a more efficient operation as the number of trucks in use is reduced and health and safety compliance is met.

In such a fast moving environment, where a large order can put a strain on capacity, reliability is critical. Gwynne Harries who manages the Stores at Senator’s Altham manufacturing site explains: “Maintenance and reliability was my top priority when it came to choosing a materials handling supplier. Briggs has provided us with a dedicated engineer who works across the five sites. He knows each site inside out and has an excellent record of reliability and high quality of maintenance. We have 98% uptime on our machines, which is critical for our business. We are rarely without a machine now for any length of time. Briggs has also increased our operational flexibility by making trucks available on stand-by, maintaining a spares cabinet on-site and providing service level agreements in the case of any downtime.”

The main challenge at the manufacturing site was to improve efficiencies. This was achieved through faster picking times and improving picking accuracy. Six Dambach high rackers, supplied and maintained by Briggs Equipment, were installed in the 11m high racking. These rail guided trucks offer precise positioning and removal of stored items even at high lift height. The rising cab can travel and elevate at the same time which allows for a high throughput of pallet movements in the smallest of aisle space.

Each pallet location is bar-coded and Senator's management system tracks capacity utilisation of each location. With eight different height locations from 35cm to 2m and an aisle width as narrow as 162cm the Dambachs can move swiftly and efficiently to pre-programmed locations thereby improving pick accuracy. Driver fatigue is virtually eliminated as the operator no longer has to look up to find the location; the machine does it for him. Racking damage has also been significantly reduced as the machines are guided by rails and driver error is eliminated. The operator can spend his time in locating and picking pallets or individual lines. This has freed up resource to enable Senator to move to perpetual stock taking and improve its stock accuracy to levels over 98% average.

"Forecasting is only ever of limited accuracy. We need to be able to react to fluctuations in demand and maintain high levels of customer service standards. We need the flexibility to change the size and type of racking location and our fleet needs to be able to cope with these changes without a loss in overall efficiency." says Gwynne.

Briggs Equipment manages a total fleet of 41 trucks across five Senator sites, this includes Caterpillar counterbalance and warehouse equipment, Combilift trucks and Narrow Aisle flexi trucks on an all-in maintenance contract.

ENDS

Editor's Notes

Briggs Equipment UK

Briggs Equipment UK, with its acquisition of Finning Materials Handling, became the sole distributor of Caterpillar counterbalance trucks and warehouse equipment in the UK, offering a range of trucks suitable for all applications – over 130 types of materials handling equipment in total. The company, which is head quartered in Cannock, provides innovative, tailored and cost effective solutions for new or used lift trucks, to buy, lease or short-term hire along with comprehensive customer support services.

Media contact:

Sue Tupling
CHANGEWORKS Communications

t/f: + 44 (0) 1785 664989
m: + 44 (0) 7703 023026

e: sue@changeworkscommunications.co.uk

Company Contact:

Sally Baker
Marketing Communications Manager
Briggs Equipment
Orbital Way
Cannock
WS11 8XW
T: 01543 437923

W: www.briggsequipment.co.uk

For high res versions of these images please contact Sue Tupling on 07703 023026