



Pick-Plank: a Safer, Faster, Dynamic Pallet-Picking Solution

Features and Benefits

- Improves ergonomics of case picking
- Reduces risk of back injury
- Maximizes storage density
- Creates dynamic pallet position

Industry Group: Ergonomics Assist
Systems Equipment
Order Fulfillment Solutions

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An order picker uses Pick-Plank to slide a heavy side of beef to the point of pick.

When heavy slabs of meat and other perishable items bogged down pallet pickers at Capital Candy Co., Inc., Operations Manager Jim Thibeault knew exactly who to call: UNEX, the company he has relied on for more than a decade to solve order-picking problems.

Walk into most distribution centers, and you will find rows and rows of less-than-full pallets inside racks and lots of empty, unused space above the cases. The reasons are obvious: Even the tallest order pickers can only reach and bend so far to retrieve bulky cases, and they need the extra overhead space to keep from head-butting beams. The result is a cumbersome, inefficient and straining order-picking process – and a waste of valuable space in pallet areas.

Capital Candy Co., Inc. knows the challenges of pallet storage and pallet picking all too well. The wholesaler provides thousands of products for convenience stores and grocery stores in Vermont, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire and New York.

“We have more than 12,000 SKUs at our distribution center, including perishables on pallets in the cooler

areas like 40-pound cases of chicken and 80-pound cases of beef,” says Jim. “We need to make the best use of our space and give workers an easy, safe way to reach the heavier SKUs.”

Pick-Plank to the Rescue

To help transform standard pallet storage into dynamic pallet storage, UNEX invented Pick-Plank, an easy-to-use order-picking device designed to improve productivity, space utilization and ergonomics on the pick floor.

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How it Works

The order-picking device attaches easily and quickly. “You set it on the pallet, use a couple of bolts, and it’s installed in about 5 minutes,” says Jim.

Once the worker picks the items closest to the aisle, the picker simply disengages a latch and in one smooth motion, slides the back half of the pallet to the front position, making all products on the pallet accessible from the aisle.

Traditionally, when a pallet is empty, it is removed from the area and restocked. But with Pick-Plank, a material handler can easily restock the pallet within the pallet rack and experience the same ergonomic advantages that Pick-Plank offers during picking.

A Big Plus for Pickers

“With Pick-Plank on our pallets, we’re seeing significantly higher productivity,” says Jim. “The ergonomic benefits are also a real advantage. The product pulls from the front, so the picker doesn’t have

to reach in 48 inches, drag the cases forward and bump his head along the way.”

In a pilot study, on average, each pick was almost 2 seconds or 9% faster with Pick-Plank compared to picking from a standard pallet.

“Pick-Plank is an effective solution for any industry that has SKUs requiring a middle-range pick, such as beer and liquor distributors and freezer and cooler operations,” says Mark Neuwirth, Vice President of Business Development for UNEX. “With Pick-Plank, pickers experience less compression on the spine, which reduces low back disorder risks from high to moderate. Pick-Plank is also proven to minimize the need for risky stepping off man-on-board picking, while increasing pick rates and worker satisfaction.”

More Products on the Pallet

One of the biggest benefits of Pick-Plank is that the device allows Capital Candy to stack considerably more product onto the pallet and reduces the need for empty overhead space.

“On typical shorty (partial) pallets, workers often do not uniformly load the pallets because they want to reduce the amount of reaching and leaning in required for the pick,” says Mark. “But with Pick-Plank, workers can have a full pallet of merchandise to work with in a compact location.”

In a pilot study, Pick-Plank improved the use of vertical space by 24% for full pallets and 43% for partial pallets.

A Rugged Ride

To withstand the toughest warehouse conditions, Pick-Plank is made of galvanized steel and rides on steel roller bearings. The device will handle 1,500 of product per pallet. The maximum pull required is 30 pounds or 3% of the product pallet load.

The unit is designed to attach to any standard 40" x 48" pallet with lag screws, which are provided, or the unit can be purchased pre-installed on a heavy duty, block-style pallet. UNEX can configure Pick-Plank with a right-handed or left-handed pull mechanism.

Partnering with the Pickability Experts

Jim has called the Pickability experts for help many times since his first project with the team in 2002. In the past, UNEX has helped Capital Candy reconfigure a warehouse and has installed multiple carton flow solutions that have maximized space and productivity and allowed Capital Candy to add hundreds of new SKUs to its warehouse.



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