HUUSKES

Foodcare Specialist

CASE STUDY ENG

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Huuskes achieves major success with the implementation of **Pick to Light zone picking system**

Case Study Pick Control
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CASE STUDY

Foodservice specialist Huuskes has increased its order picking capacity with a combination of zone picking, pick carts and Pick to Light technology. Pcdata has delivered a turn-key solution and as system integrator, it was responsible for the control and integration of the transport system. The result is a scalable system that enables Huuskes to grow in volume by fifty percent over the next few years. Hugo Abbink, department manager chilled products at Huuskes, is pleased with the system: "We can now process more orders with the same number of people."

Since its start in 1956, Huuskes has grown into a nationally operating supplier, producer and knowledge partner in food and beverages for healthcare and corporate catering. The company, originally from Twente in the Netherlands, not only acts as a wholesaler, but also has its own butcher's shop, poultry plant, vegetable cutting plant and kitchen. There, Huuskes prepares thousands of food components and meals every day that can be delivered to the catering industry, care institutions and hospitals throughout the Netherlands on a group and individual basis.

The growth of the company forced Huuskes to open a new logistics center in January 2018. At the existing location in the east of Enschede there was no more space. "By moving the logistics to the west of Enschede, we can grow the production again," explains Abbink. "The food components, meals and other products that we produce elsewhere arrive at the logistics center in crates that are de-palletized and sorted by route fully automatically. We add a variety of chilled and fresh products, such as dairy products, salads, juices, meat products and other groceries from the refrigerated section."

Congestion in aisles

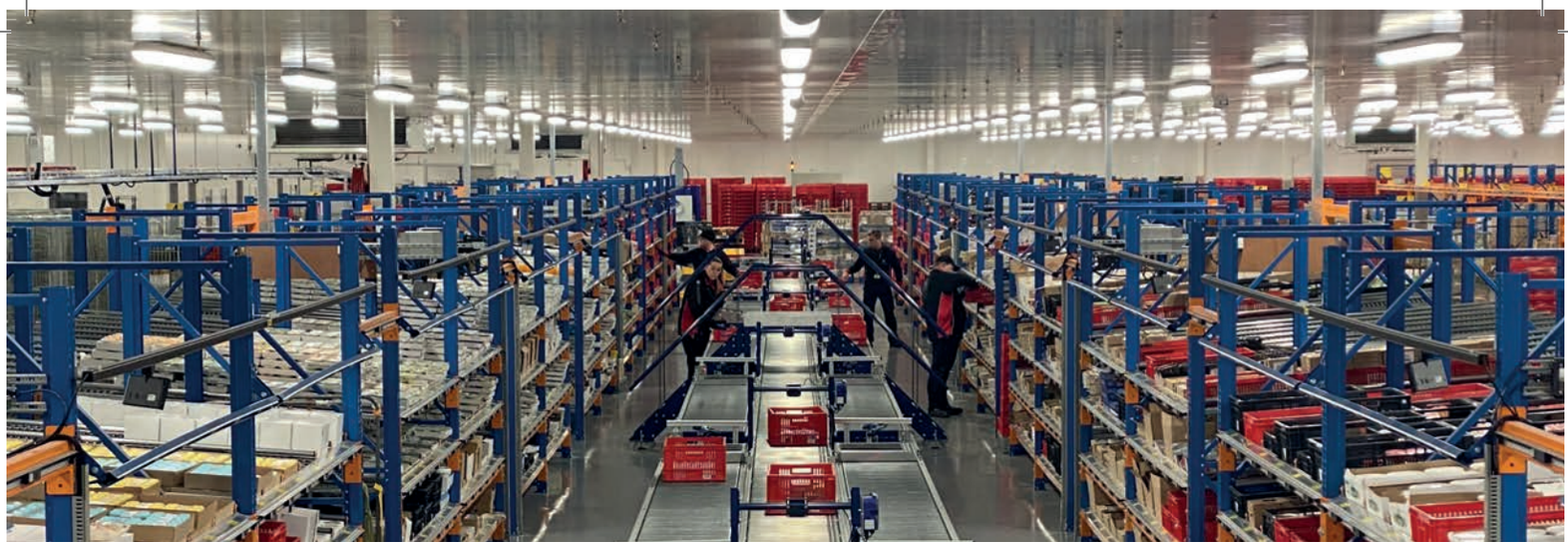
In the fall of 2020, Huuskes put a completely new order picking system for chilled and fresh products into operation. The old system could no longer handle the growing number of order lines. "We were using pick carts that were equipped with Pick to Light displays just like the pick locations. A great way of working, but the capacity was limited. In order to process more order lines, we could have used even more order pickers with even more carts, but that would have only led to traffic jams in the aisles. We had to find another solution," Abbink explains.

At a trade fair, Huuskes came into contact with Pcdata, which demonstrated the benefits of zone picking. During a visit to Holland & Barrett's logistics center in the UK, Abbink and his colleagues became convinced of the advantages of this concept. At the heart of the concept is a transport system that routes crates destined for customers to pick locations. Order pickers do not have to walk along the racks themselves with carts full of crates, but can stay in their own zone. "This system enables us to process many more orders with the same number of people and still create more calm and control on the shop floor," explains Abbink.

More speed with zone picking

Pcdata's new zone picking system consists of flow racks with 750 pick locations, divided into sixteen zones. The transport system between the flow racks sends each crate to the right zone. Once the crate has arrived there, the zone display shows the crate's unique number and the total number of picks for that zone. Once the operator has checked the last three digits of the crate number, he can start picking. The illuminated Pick to Light displays show which items are to be picked. The first digit on the display represents the number of cartons, the second digit represents the number of single items. With the push of a button, each pick is confirmed and recorded.

When the operator is finished, he pushes the crate back on the conveyor system and continues with the next order. Meanwhile, the conveyor system takes the crate to the next zone, where another operator takes over the order. "Pcdata's control system knows exactly which crate needs to go to which zones," Abbink explains. "If a zone already has five crates waiting, the system will skip that zone for a while and send



the crate to another zone first. In this way, we can distribute the workload as well as possible among the zones."

Integration with PickCarts

Not all refrigerated and fresh produce is in the zone picking system. The slow moving products are in an area with a combination of pallet and shelf racks. In this area, the operators work with pick carts as before. Each cart holds 24 or 30 crates, so they can pick multiple orders at once. Pickkar Light to Light solution from Pcdata is now used: the display of each pick location shows the total number of items the operator needs to pick, the displays on the cart indicate how to distribute them among the different crates. "In the meantime, we've decided to also place the most important fast runners in this area, so we can leave them on the pallets. If we had to put those in the flow-through racks, we would spend too much time replenishing the picking locations."

Both order picking methods fit together seamlessly. When an operator is finished with his pick cart, he places the crates on the conveyor system. The Pcdata control system sends crates that are full to the sorting system in the shipping department. Crates that still have space left go to the zone picking system. "In this way, the system ensures that all crates are filled optimally. The system makes a volume calculation in advance and calculates how many small, medium and large crates we need per order. When an operator gets to work with a pick cart, the colors of the displays indicate which crates with what size he needs."

Easy scaling up and down

An exception in the order picking process are the 'uglies': the items that are too big or too heavy for a crate on the transport system. "For this we use barcode stickers. All picked items receive a sticker and go in roll cages directly to the shipping department," Abbink explains. "The control system from Pcdata controls the entire process. This system receives the orders from our ERP system Infor M3 and breaks them down into partial orders for the various order picking areas. Via a large screen in the hall, the operators can monitor the progress of all areas precisely. They can see, for example, how many order lines have been completed and how many order lines are still open."

The zone picking system is very much to its liking. Huuskes can process many more order lines than before without operators getting in each other's way. "Each operator works in their own zone. Because they no longer have to walk through the entire warehouse with picking carts, we save a lot of time," says Abbink, who adds that the system can easily be scaled up or down. On a typical Wednesday, his team needs to process an average of 11,000 order lines, but on Fridays that can rise to 21,000 order lines. "Now one operator serves two, three or four pick zones depending on how busy it is. But if necessary, we can place an operator in each zone. In which case we will have to increase the speed of the roller conveyor a little," laughs Abbink.

Fewer customer complaints

Besides speed, quality is another important criterion for Huuskes. Huuskes has made great strides in that area with the integration of a weighing system in the transport system. Before the crates go to the shipping department, the weighing system checks the weight of the contents based on the data in the control system. If the weight deviates too much, the contents are checked manually. "It took some time before the quality of the data was good enough and the tolerances were set properly. Think, for example, of meat products that are not all exactly the same weight. Now that the weighing system is working properly, deviations are noted that were not noticed before, resulting in customers getting too much or too little. We now notice that the number of complaints about this has decreased significantly."

A year after the system was put into operation, Huuskes has not yet made the most of it. Abbink expects that the productivity can be increased a lot further. "It takes time to fine-tune the system. Take for example the allocation of fast runners and slow runners to the various pick locations. We try to place the items so that heavy items end up at the bottom and fragile items on top, but we also have to take into account the distribution of the workload. Initially, for example, we had put all the meat products in the last zones. As a result, the operators in that zone were extremely busy while their colleagues had nothing to do a few zones further down. We are learning to use the system better and better."

Hugo Abbink
department manager chilled at Huuskes

"This system enables us to process many more orders with the same number of people and still create more peace on the shop floor."

Long-term cooperation

As a system integrator for the project, Pcdata supplied the picking carts, the zone picking system as well as the transport system. Huuskes is very satisfied with the cooperation. For the implementation of the Pick to Light technology Abbink gives the grade nine. "Of course, in every project there is something that goes differently than expected. But all problems were solved adequately. We wanted one partner for the entire project. Pcdata fulfilled that role very well and constantly thought along with us, even after delivery. That's important, because the purchase of a system like this is the start of a long-term collaboration. With this system we can grow another 50 percent in volume. With Pcdata's help, we can go on for years."

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