PON LOGISTICS

CASE STUDY

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Pon Logistics sorts parts by license plate using putwalls

Case Study Pick Control

CASE STUDY

Pon Logistics saves car dealers throughout the Netherlands a great deal of time sorting and packing parts by license plate. The logistics provider has set up a sophisticated process in its warehouse in Leusden using putwalls. Pcdata is responsible for the installation of the putwalls and the integration with conveyors and automatic packaging machines. Mr. van Dijk and Mr. Vos of Pon Logistics: "The process now runs a lot faster and is much less prone to errors."

Pon Logistics is the logistics service provider for, among others, Pon's automotive dealership, importer of car brands such as Volkswagen, Audi, Seat, Skoda and Porsche. From its 25,000 square meter warehouse in Leusden, the logistics provider supplies parts to all Dutch dealers of these car brands. "With over a hundred employees, we process here between 16,000 and 20,000 order lines a day," says van Dijk, project manager at Pon Logistics.

The warehouse is divided into different zones. The small parts are stored in an automated storage system with 48 shuttles. These shuttles supply the containers for four order picking stations with pick stock. Order pickers are then ready to pick the right number of parts and place them in the right order bins. "In addition, we have an S sector for medium-sized parts such as car mats and a V sector for large parts such as car windows and bumpers. These are in pallet racks and we collect them using order pick trucks," explains Rienk Vos, team leader at Pon Logistics.

Sorting by license plate

A number of years ago, a study looked at ways to make dealer operations more efficient. That resulted in a new service: putting together parts packages per work order. "Until then, the dealers received a number of crates with the necessary parts every day. They first had to put these in their own parts warehouse, where the car mechanics could locate them. Sorting small parts by license plate allows for dealers to skip a few steps in their process," Van Dijk explains.

Sorting out parts turned out to be a very labor-intensive process. In the warehouse, Pon Logistics had set up a manual process with roller conveyors containing hundreds of crates. Employees then walked past the crates to put the collected parts in the right bin per work order. "In the beginning that worked fine, but as volumes grew the process became unworkable. At one point we were working on 500 work orders at a time and as the roller conveyor was too small, bins were placed on the floor. We had to work overtime every day to deliver the part packages on time."

Putwalls instead of sorters

At first the search for a solution led to a fully automated sorting system, but that took up a lot of space and offered much more capacity than Pon Logistics needed. This system would be unused for most of the day

A further search on the Internet and trade shows showed Pon Logistics the use of 'putwalls': digital sorting cabinets with a large number of compartments. There are now six putwalls, each with sixty compartments, located on a mezzanine floor in the warehouse. They were supplied and installed by Pcdata, the putwalls itself were custom built by SKILD. The software and hardware was supplied by Pcdata. "We talked to several parties, but chose Pcdata amongst others because of their willingness to also integrate our packaging machines into the total solution. That combination provides additional efficiency," explains Van Dijk.

The process starts with the compilation of batches in the warehouse management system (WMS). Each batch consists of 80 work orders, accounting for about 300 parts. The order pickers collect these parts,

batch by batch in plastic totes, which are then placed on a roller conveyor facing the putwalls. A scanner above the conveyor reads the bin barcode, which enables Pcdata's operating software to distribute the bins per batch to the putwalls. Once the first bin of a batch has arrived, sorting can start. Pcdata's operating system ensures that batches are kept together.

Sorting out is also fully guided by Pcdata software. As soon as the operator scans a part, LED strips on both sides of the compartment indicate in which compartment it should be placed. Parts that belong to the same work order end up in the same compartment. When a work order is complete, a green display lights up at the back of the putwall. This signals the packer to empty the compartment and pack the parts.

Automatic packing

The six putwalls are arranged in two U-shapes with an Autobag in the middle of each U. This is a packaging machine that automatically produces, opens and closes plastic bags. When a work order is complete and the packer pushes the green light, the dealer's address is printed directly onto the plastic bag. All that is left to do is to take the parts out of the box and put them in the bag. The bag is then automatically closed and transported onto a conveyor. "Manual packing and sticking shipping labels is unnecessary and without a paper shipping label, the bag is more recyclable," explains Van Dijk.

Mr. van Dijk
Project manager at Pon Logistics

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Also during the project the Pcdata team was flexible and able to accommodate our thoughts and needs.“

Not all parts packages are packed this way. Some packages are too large for the Autobag, while others only count one part. " We are not going to pack that one part in a bag as well. In that case, the packer can send a command to a label printer by pushing a function button on the display. That prints a shipping label that we stick directly onto that part," Vos says. "All the parts packages go to a sorting line, where they are collected in bins per dealer."

Smooth implementation

The installation of the putwalls including the roller conveyors and packaging machines went very smooth. "The first few days after commissioning we put time aside solving start up problems. Faster than expected, we were able to ramp up the volumes," says Van Dijk, who has experienced the cooperation with Pcdata as positive. "One of the reasons to choose Pcdata is the way they communicate and collaborate with us. Also during the project the Pcdata team was flexible and able to accommodate our thoughts and needs."

Less prone to error

The main advantage of the putwalls is the time saved. Sorting out parts is going a lot faster than before, improving the productivity of the entire operation. In addition, this process is much less error-prone. Ergonomics have also improved – as there is less need for employees to lift and to bend," says Vos.

Facts & figures

Pon Logistics

Location: **Leusden**

Warehouse: **Leusden location 25.000 m²**

Employees: **100 in DC Leusden, 450+ in total**

Activity: **Delivering parts to dealers and repair shops**

Project: **Solution for sorting parts including 6 putwalls, 2 automatic packaging machines and roller conveyors for box transport**

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