

# Responding to Seasonal Peaks



With containers of products from the Far East increasing rapidly, home improvement retailer Homebase looked for a partner who could provide the control and efficiency needed for these direct imports.

“The fact that it is a shared user site was very attractive. It gives us the flexibility of space and labour we required.”

They chose Unipart Logistics to provide the flexible service required.

“We decided to outsource because we needed a specialist facility for imported products,” states

Richard Morgan, Supply

Chain Director for Homebase. “We chose the Cowley site operated by Unipart Logistics for a number of reasons. The fact that it is a shared user site was very attractive. It gives us the flexibility of space and labour we required.”

The facility operates 24 / 7 and handles

a core base of year-round products, ranging from bathroom fittings to pedal bins. Originally occupying a space of some 70,000 sq ft, Homebase rapidly increased their use of this flexible facility, expanding up to 300,000 sq ft and adding seasonal items.

Barbecues, outdoor toys and garden power tools are all now moved through the site. “The seasonal products were not in the original plan, but we have increased the volume of imports and these have all been put through the Cowley site with increasing success,” comments Morgan. “In 2006 there have been well over 1 million cases and Unipart Logistics has certainly met the service expectations of improved availability in store for our customers.”

One of the characteristics of the seasonal products is the need for rapid reaction to demand. Products such as air-conditioners have very sharp, short-term

## HOMEBASE

### Industry Sector

Home improvement retail

### Issue

Management of growing direct imports

### Solution

Flexible solution in shared user facility

### Benefits

Able to incorporate rapid growth and handle seasonal products with fluctuating demand; partnership for implementation of WMS

## UNIPART LOGISTICS

peaks dependent on the weather, requiring considerable flexibility from the Unipart Logistics operation, including adaptable labour and resources.

Up to 200 containers per week are

observes Morgan.

There is a culture of involvement and engagement with all staff and communications right the way through to warehouse operatives. The successful



unloaded and palletised. Storage is in very narrow aisle racking for slower moving items, or block stack for faster moving and seasonal goods. Much of the operation requires order picking, including low level picking from wide aisle pallet racking, with reserve stock located above. All loads are assembled at goods out and loaded onto vehicles for onwards delivery to the 300 Homebase retail outlets in the UK and Ireland.

Since implementing the initial operation, Unipart Logistics has been applying the skills and techniques from the unique Unipart Way to provide improvements and flexibility. "One unique aspect of Unipart Logistics is that they have brought lean thinking to the warehouse environment,"

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implementation of the Homebase Warehouse Management System on the site is an illustration of this approach. The change management partnership capitalised on Homebase's experience of the system, and the expertise and techniques applied by Cowley personnel.

"Since the start, there have been significant improvements in reliability and consistency and we are now putting through a record number of cases, upwards of 140,000 per week," adds Morgan. "The Unipart heritage was in manufacturing and automotive, seemingly very different to retail. We now have a greater appreciation and understanding of each other and can work to our respective strengths, thereby improving the service we provide to our stores and our customers."

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