

MODERN MATERIALS HANDLING

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REDUCED PICKER TIME

A Swedish retailer uses a mobile system solution to double order-picking productivity at its main distribution center outside Stockholm.

By Lorie King Rogers, Associate Editor

Traditional vehicle-based order-picking processes can include many unproductive, time and energy wasting steps like picking up empty pallets or roller containers, delivering filled pallets, stepping up and down from the vehicle—not to mention actually driving the vehicle from point to point. All of these processes can be unwanted time wasters. And in the materials handling business, time is money.

Managers at the second largest retailer in Sweden, Coop Inkop och Logistik AB (Cilab), needed to reduce operating costs and address capacity issues at their terminal in Bro, the largest grocery distribution center in northern Europe. With 700 retail outlets to service, Coop's order picking function is a critical process that requires 24/7 uptime. Coop's Bro terminal handles 3,500 pallets every day, 65 million packages a year, and the company cannot afford to waste time in the process.

After a careful evaluation process that included observation and analysis of Coop's process and workflow, a mobile vehicle solution (Kollmorgen, 540-467-3086, www.pick-n-go.com, na.pickngo@kollmorgen.com) was implemented to drive several picking process improvements. An automated guided vehicle (AGV) makes order-picking more efficient while improving ergonomics for the picker, resulting in reduced operator stress and improved picking productivity.

Wherever the worker goes to pick an item, the truck automatically follows. The vehicle escorts the picker and is always optimally positioned to minimize the distance and effort needed to pick and place products on the waiting pallet.

MODERN PRODUCTIVITY SOLUTION



The system makes sure the trucks are always in the right place with the forks at the right height. So far, the implementation has reduced picker time spent on unproductive tasks and time-consuming interruptions by 50%, thereby improving picker productivity by 100%, and leading to a significant reduction in operating costs and an increase in capacity.

Coop's first installation phase included 12 vehicles, with a second, larger phase underway. This mobile solution provides flexibility and has enabled Coop to gain immediate and measurable productivity improvements. 