



thespeedchallenge

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Fashionably early

Urban Outfitters relies on pack-to-light technologies and sophisticated browser-based software to quickly deliver the apparel that sets the fashion trends.

KEEPING UP WITH THE LATEST FASHIONS IS NOT EASY FOR EVEN the trendiest young consumers, and it is no less of a challenge to the companies that bring them the hot, hip apparel they desire. One retailer that continually outperforms its competitors is Urban Outfitters. In an industry that demands being first to market, Urban Outfitters relies on innovative material handling technology to quickly process the hottest fashions for its Urban Outfitters, Anthropologie and Free People stores in the U.S., Canada and the British Isles.

Its primary store distribution center in Gap, Pennsylvania, is responsible for processing some 90,000 units each day at 99.75 percent accuracy. In addition, this facility has enabled an average annual growth rate of over 20 percent since beginning operations in 1996.

"We're opening 35-40 stores this year," says Ken McKinney, director of distribution. "When we moved into this facility we had only 30 stores. We are now processing for just shy of 180 stores, so it is effectively six times the volume that was here when we originally moved in."

The DC's ability to handle such a leap in throughput is due in large part to a sophisticated pack-to-light solution provided by AL Systems. The application enables Urban's staff to productively, quickly and accurately fulfill the orders bound for its stores. In fact, 85 percent of all merchandise processed in the facility passes through the system.

"What this technology has allowed us to do is to grow without expanding the building," adds McKinney. "We really haven't even had to add a shift yet and we still have a lot more capacity on this system than we are currently utilizing."

The AL Systems solution consists of 1,100 locations where shipping cartons are placed to represent individual stores. The system

is very flexible, as locations can easily change as dictated by store demand. Totes containing needed items are conveyed to the DynaPack area, where they are diverted down the system's ten lanes. A worker reaches into the tote to scan an accompanying document, which triggers the illumination of lights and quantity indicators adjacent to locations that require that product. The

worker then simply places needed items into the store cartons. Using the system, workers at Urban Outfitters achieve a remarkable 1,200 picks per man hour. The browser-based DynaPack software provided by AL Systems also allows managers to easily track performance.

"We can monitor each lane to assure that work reaches our standards," explains Steve Wolanin, retail distribution manager. "We can then allocate work where needed. And our recent software upgrade in May gives us even more flexibility to see our productivity." McKinney adds that that upgrade was quite seamless and was completed in a very short timeline.

In addition to the software that controls the pack-to-light area, AL Systems provided Urban Outfitters with manifesting software and software that enables crossdocking. AL Systems also designed and installed middleware between the facility's Island Pacific host system and the various devices level controls, such as the RF system, the conveyors and the sortation system.

"Product moves through this building a full day faster than in our old facility," adds McKinney. "Once it hits inbound, it is like greased lightning."

That's a good thing in an industry where there is no such thing as being fashionably late.

For more information on solutions from AL Systems, call 800-548-3745 or visit www.alsystems.com.



Products speed through Urban Outfitters using pack-to-light technology, which packs items at the same time that they are picked.

To watch a three-minute video of operations at Urban Outfitters' Gap, Pa., distribution center, go to www.dcvelocity.com and click on The SPEED Challenge.