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Palletways has developed technology which captures the data of every pallet and vehicle entering its hubs with the same high definition cameras used to inspect the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. Rob Gittins – **Palletways UK** managing director – explains the benefits of its award-winning archway scanning system.



■ **The solution to this problem came from two rather unusual sources; an architectural surveyor who was using a high definition camera to inspect the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and a facial and vehicle recognition software.** ■

SHD: How has Palletways developed its warehouse operations to support the movement of goods in and out of transport hubs?

RG: In total, Palletways handles over 38,000 pallets daily across all of its operations, including more than 23,000 pallets a day in the UK, so it's incredibly important our warehouse operations are as efficient as possible.

A problem we had to contend with back in 2012 was addressing the quality of data capture in the context of increasing volumes within a network where a pallet is collected by one member, processed by a central hub and delivered by another member.

Traditionally in pallet networks, manual scanning is used to capture information. Inevitably, this increases the chance of human errors occurring, which can cause huge operational issues. We also had no way of capturing and viewing information on the condition of individual pallets.

The solution to this problem came from two rather unusual sources; an architectural surveyor who was using a high definition camera to inspect the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris and a facial and vehicle recognition software.

Palletways IT and Hub Operations teams felt that if these two technologies could be combined, they could automate vehicle and pallet scanning, provide a photographic image of every pallet and thereby improve performance to meet customer needs.

The FBI and cheese image scanning provided the key to developing our technology. Palletways first tried to capture images using conventional digital photography, to limited success. Through our POD scanner supplier, we were referred to a specialist who had worked with the FBI on handwriting recognition, forensic typewriter ribbon analysis and image scanning of cheese during maturation. It was this link that provided the breakthrough.

From initial conception to launch, it took three years to perfect our award-winning archway scanning system, which is operational at the Palletways UK national hub. The system is scalable and is being replicated in every hub and depot throughout the entire Palletways European network.

This unique and ground-breaking system was designed and developed by Palletways to automatically scan and photograph in high definition, every vehicle and every pallet handled by its UK national hub and to enable all stakeholders to access the data and photographic images in real time. This practically eliminates missing pallets, damage, theft and security issues, and the possibility of false claims for loss or damage of goods, which greatly benefits our customers.

The total investment into the technology has been

£750,000, which includes development, capital and management time. Since Palletways implemented the archway scanning system in 2012 at the network's main national hub in Fradley, 20 million pallets have been through the scanners.

SHD: How has the archway scanning system technology benefited Palletways?

RG: The business and our customers have hugely benefited from the introduction of this technology. Firstly, we can directly and instantly access information on every pallet passing through our hubs, which previously took 24 hours. Secondly, efficiency has jumped; there has been a 23% improvement in the number of pallets processed and our network service performance has improved by 1.5%. Finally, we are far more efficient as a business, with a 6% reduction in cost per pallet with handling issues being resolved significantly faster through transparency and consistency of information. All of these benefits filter directly through to our customers as we can offer a more efficient, streamlined and reliable service.

SHD Logistics (SHD): How important is technology to the growth of Palletways?

Rob Gittins (RG): Our commitment to technology is one of the main reasons why Palletways is Europe's number one palletised freight network.

For example, our Digital Information Hub, a first for the pallet network sector when we launched it in 2013, provides our teams with real-time intelligence including vehicle use, traffic planning and progress on individual consignments to support delivery across our network.

Secondly, our ETA system provides customers with a two-hour delivery notification window for palletised freight – an industry first service which was once the preserve of the small parcel sector. The system is one of the largest developments undertaken by Palletways and underpins our strategy to constantly innovate, using technology to drive efficiency and growth through the provision of consistent, real-time data to the customers who rely on this information.

All 114 of our UK members can now provide a two-hour delivery window for the delivery of products and provide notifications of consignment progress via SMS and email to either their customers or directly to the end-user. This technology, which isn't available through any other pallet network, allows businesses in the industry to be as efficient as possible. ■

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