



“The machine does exactly what Sparck said it would do and, importantly, what we needed it to do.”

Neil Lavercombe
Business Planning Manager at iForce

Challenges

Challenges in finding available labour, combined with rising costs, prompted logistics service provider, iForce, and their client, The Works, to re-think their approach to achieving peak for the leading toys and stationery retailer. Ensuring reliable fulfilment would require a commitment to advanced automation including state-of-the-art, right-size packaging technology from Sparck.

Customer service is of prime importance to the business – efficient fulfilment of online orders, along with prompt delivery of well packaged items is essential for winning repeat sales. However, with the industry wide scarcity of suitable labour, and the inevitable rises in labour costs, delivering increasing peak volumes was becoming ever more challenging.

To address these issues, in 2020 iForce embarked on a business-wide initiative to develop a strategy for investment into advanced warehouse automation, and as a key client The Works was fully involved and supportive of the move.

There were three elements to the strategy: robotic goods-to-person order picking, robot assisted picking and automated packaging systems. However, it was absolutely critical that all three should work in perfect synchronisation with each other.

Let's talk about automated packaging

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Solution

Neil Lavercombe, Business Planning Manager at iForce, responsible for ecommerce development, explains: “When it came to evaluating the different packing solutions on the market, we quickly determined that the principle of auto fit-to-size packaging had big advantages over the traditional box-closer systems, and the supplier that really stood out was Sparck Technologies with their CVP Impact machine.”

Speed, throughput and reliability are core attributes of Sparck's fit-to-size auto-boxing technology, an important capability given that at peak The Works will see around 70% of their ecommerce parcels created automatically by the CVP Impact.

Typical ecom challenges around very changeable order profiles at peak, multi-item orders and SKU variance play to the strengths of the CVP Impact and the inherent flexibility of Sparck's fit-to-size technology. According to Lavercombe: “Order profiles, in terms of items per order together with the physical size of orders, can vary throughout the year, ranging from a typical ecom profile of one or two items per order to 10+ items per order. The CVP Impact simply produces the right sized packaging for whatever orders we have.” As a consequence, significant savings in material costs have been achieved.

There are important benefits for the customer too. By creating custom sized packaging for each order, the customer receives a compact, right-sized box, which is more convenient to carry, eliminates 'consumer distress' over wasteful packaging and delivers a positive environmental message. A further advantage of the fit-to-size cardboard packaging is a snug fit to the product, which prevents items moving around, providing better protection without the need for bubble-wrap or void-fill.

“We wanted to keep things very simple,” says Lavercombe. “The packaging machine had to integrate with both our existing manual processes and our new robotic systems – once again the simple approach of the Sparck machine worked for us.” He adds: “Installation too went exceptionally smoothly. The machine arrived on Monday morning and there were boxes coming off the line the following Friday. It was fully operational within two weeks.

Summing up Neil Lavercombe says: “Sparck is supporting us all the way. It truly feels like a partnership rather than a customer - supplier relationship.”

Benefits

Multi- and single-items in one seamless flow

Positive environmental impact

Perfect synchronization with warehouse automation

Excellent partnership

iFORCE

Sparck
Technologies