

CASE STUDY



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Customer: Mitsubishi Pencil Company

TAKING PEN PUSHING TO A NEW LEVEL

As far as communication technology goes there is possibly nothing more ubiquitous than the pen. It's in every home, business, classroom, and in most pockets. And even though we write less letters and postcards home, as an essential communication and creative tool, the humble pen still outstrips smartphones, laptops and other digital kit when it comes to universal ownership and consumption.

Mitsubishi Pencil company is an international business with a number of familiar brands, most notably, UNI-BALL. It is constantly improving its product designs and technology, which is one of the reasons that is driving consistent demand and new markets, such as creative and craft sectors.

High volumes and regular demand mean that smart warehousing and logistics is essential. Originally located in Worcester, Mitsubishi recently moved into a purpose-built UK facility where all its core activities, stock management and distribution are centred.



The new site offers two and a half times more storage space with a mezzanine floor area of 6,800 square feet - almost the same size as the entire storage area at the previous site.

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Prioritising safety in their new location, Director of Operations Stuart Elder was looking for a solution that would allow efficient materials flow, but segregate forklift movements from people. “We have effectively a four-stage process. Bulk deliveries of pens are received from our Japan manufacturing base, or sometimes from our French stock facility, we then need to arrange for these to be sorted into product lines and packaged by our external contract packaging suppliers to convert bulk pens to final products, as these finished products are received back to us we need to store and pick according to customer requirements”.

The materials handling and logistics challenge involves around 800 individual pens, received in bulk consignments which are transformed into around 1200 finished products SKUs (stock keeping units). In total therefore, up-to 2000 items to manage. To accommodate this volume the warehouse has over 800 pallet spaces and more than 1000 pick locations.



Separating the forklifts operating in the main warehouse, moving bulk and palletized materials from the finished products storage and order picking process was a key health and safety objective.

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“We approached Amvar for advice and ideas on how we could achieve this goal and they took us to a number of sites to demonstrate how mezzanine floors not only add considerably more useable space but provide a safe working environment without compromising work flow efficiency,” explained Stuart.

Our finished products are delivered to the mezzanine by forklift through a safety gate that ensures no conflict between equipment and people. All stock movement on the upper floor is completed with pallet trucks and is therefore free of heavy motorised traffic.

The whole construction and installation project took almost 24 months to complete. However, the internal storage facilities and mezzanine took just 10 weeks from measuring to finished installation.

Amar Handling Solutions, a Midlands-based warehouse storage and handling integration company specialises in mid-size warehouse projects. They bring together all the key aspects of storage and handling, designing solutions, project managing the installation and providing the optimum handling equipment. Amvar supplied and installed the product racking on the mezzanine floor, along with pallets trucks, safety lift gates and wrapping turntable all as part on the integrated, single-source package.

Malcolm Mitchell, Amvar’s Managing Director believes their strength lies in their ability to be completely flexible about which products are selected. “We have access to several options for equipment, so we select and propose best equipment that offers the right fit. We then integrate this equipment with safe and efficient storage and racking systems so that every aspect of the operation fits together seamlessly”.

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In Mitsubishi's new ground floor warehouse facility, Amvar designed and installed the pallet racking system and supplied Flexi-truck fork lifts. These were selected for their unique capability to provide general forklift capacity and to operate as an effective warehouse truck. It has an articulated mast which enables it to operate in narrow aisles down to 1800mm width, maximising space utilisation.

As part of Amvar's productive and safe warehousing proposals, a new warehouse man-riser order picking lift truck is about to be delivered and training provided. This will replace existing equipment that involves a two-person operation to pick or locate stock.



Stuart Elder summed this up. "We have enjoyed significant benefits from working with a single point supplier. They have helped us to think through and deliver simple and effective solutions across the whole warehouse, addressing the various interconnected issues that make up a complete functioning operation. It also means we have just one contact point to sort out servicing, repairs, glitches or niggles. There is no call-centre, just a small team we know and trust, who are constantly available to help with any issues that arise".

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“For any business that has to manage a diverse and demanding supply chain with customer deadlines across a large stock variety, the benefit of having a supply-partner that can take on responsibility for important parts of the operation is inevitably going to make life easier”.

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