Balloon One opens the door to warehouse success for Premium Timber Products

Premium Timber Products supplies major out-of-town retailers across the UK with up to 1,500 high volume products, including internal and external doors, PVCu doors, windows and fascias, and landscaping products. Its well-known customers include B&Q and Magnet. This requires warehouse management at its best.

The task involves managing several thousands of product lines, from two large (150,000 sq ft) warehouses – one in Dewsbury, West Yorkshire and the other in Weare, Somerset, plus OEM products held by the stores themselves. It is a highly efficient operation that uses clever warehouse management (WMS) system integration and support from Balloon One to make it all work smoothly.
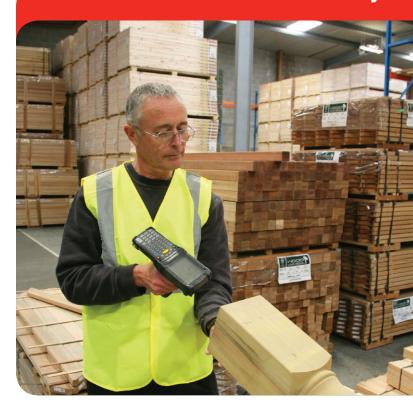
Premium's IT system combines a sophisticated business software package (SAP Business One) with a powerful and intelligent wireless WMS (Accellos) featuring barcode picking and EDI for order taking. In today's competitive markets, such technology is necessary for doing business with big retail organisations, many of which are using similar technologies themselves and need their suppliers to provide an electronic means of ordering products based on live and accurate stock levels.

In 2005, Les Harris joined the company as its IT and Administration Manager. His initial role was to improve Premium's warehouse technology. The existing Unix-based system needed updating and he began investigating newer, future proof, scalable options.

"We looked at what was available from the main enterprise resource planning (ERP) vendors but found what they offered lacked what we needed. We did not want a system that dictated how we would run the company. Instead, we want to focus on our business with the software supporting it so that we can maximise our efficiencies and service levels.

"We recognised Balloon One's offering to be the right fit for our business. The system would integrate readily with our business system and would allow us to replicate the functionality

and features of our old Unix WMS as well as allow us to easily develop the system as we needed," says Les Harris.

After settling on the integrated WMS, it became clear that Balloon One could also support the SAP system too, as well as look after the electronic order system (EDI) integration requirements. This was clearly advantageous to Premium as Les Harris and his colleagues would deal with one software contractor.

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"I am the first line of support internally, but for anything else that needs external intervention we use Balloon One. The team is very responsive and we are pleased with the partnership. You don't want to be dealing with different companies for IT support as there are many grey areas. With Balloon One, we deal with people who have a big picture view of how the various software packages are integrated and how they work to support the business," he says.

"We have a long working day from 6am until 10pm at night and we know that Balloon One can offer the right level of support we need during those hours. This means we can maintain service excellence at all times to our customers. Orders are received by EDI each day and these are processed within 1.5 hours and made ready for the 6am shift the next day; so it is essential that everything is ready for them when they get in."

The WMS is very flexible and scalable. It performs all of the required functions for Premium's warehousing operations. It features barcode picking using wireless handheld terminals (Motorola) for highly accurate picking with real-time communication of jobs and data capture. The system uploads data to the back office systems every 30 minutes, with real-time stock levels always visible on the WMS.

By using barcode picking, Premium has a full audit trail, giving total visibility of stock movements and who picked the items and their individual productivity.

"This is a very accurate system that gives full visibility of warehouse stock. If you move something, it is recorded immediately. It is extremely user friendly and new staff learn how to use the system quickly. This is important as warehouse operational staff need to be able to get on with their jobs, without worrying about learning complicated technology," says Les Harris.

The warehouse processes around 300 orders each day comprising thousands of individual products. The majority of orders are to the retailers' stores, with deliveries made weekly. Home delivery items are made daily.

The WMS also provides two other important functions: a manufacturing module and a QA process. With the manufacturing module, consumers can configure doors to suit their exact requirements. This covers the position of hinges, locks and types of locks, door furniture, optional extras, etc.

The QA warehouse functionality gives Premium a virtual warehouse for items failing quality control (QC). These are held outside of the good stock. It allows Premium to either to return the products to its suppliers, write off the items or sell on the products to other outlets that deal in second quality products.

About Balloon One

Balloon One is an IT provider specialising in the distribution, implementation and support of business software and supply chain applications. The company has strong product knowledge and business know-how, which enables Balloon One to deliver real value to its customers. Balloon One's goal is to make large scale enterprise applications accessible to small and midsize companies. The company focuses on applications that are affordable and easy to implement that deliver a rapid return on investment.

With 20 years experience in the business application market the company has worked with hundreds of businesses. The company has customers in a wide range of markets, including: packaging, toy / gift, hobby, clothing, wholesale, retail, timber, DIY, furniture, education, leisure, IT, electronics, healthcare, medical distribution, water treatment, and chemicals and lubricants.

In 2002, Balloon One was appointed as the first business partner for SAP Business One and today it is widely respected as a worldwide Business One centre of expertise. In 2004, the company added the Accellos One Warehouse solution to its product portfolio. In 2007, Balloon One was awarded Partner of the Year by Accellos for its outstanding sales and implementation success.