

# Doubling Up

Dimensioning and Weighing options are becoming ever more versatile and cost-effective, as Steve Grimbley of EXDS explains to *Paul Hamblin*.

It may be hard to believe, but even in this omnichannel world, there are still businesses out there that are still using a paper and pen – or maybe a spreadsheet – to identify their product lines. With the proven efficiency of WMS and TMS systems changing the landscape, however, dimensioning and weighing technology (DWS) has become an integral ingredient of the supply chain process. Steve Grimbley is confident that, to a business willing and ready to undergo the necessary transformation, DWS offers unparalleled improvements to both productivity and accuracy across the storage, replenishment, picking and shipping processes.

“Whether you’re wanting to maximise space in the DC, or minimise space in your packaging, the data the CubiScan solution will provide to your host system will give you the tools to make the optimum decisions,” he explains. Grimbley founded Excellent Dimensioning Systems (EXDS) in 2001 and is the exclusive distributor in the UK and Ireland of Utah(USA)-based CubiScan, a proven leading-edge product in the field.

He operates in three main areas – logistics and distribution, merchandising (he quotes two household-name UK supermarkets as using DWS to plan shelf-edges and therefore optimise in-store merchandising appropriately for specific

products) and transportation. “One UK supermarket took 20 CubiScans and within two months the number of cages per week leaving each DC dropped by 60, because they were able to plan more precisely thanks to the data,” he recalls.

The nature of the opportunity has changed. “In the past, warehouses and DCs did count their products – but did they have 100 washers, or 100 washing machines? Now the measuring and weighing technology allows them to identify much more acutely and plan for parcel or pallet accordingly.”

Grimbley is particularly excited by the opportunity provided by the CubiScan 125 because it offers a hugely cost-effective versatility, able to switch from the traditional DC scanning requirement (via bulk cases) to the increasingly vital B2C method, where individual items are scanned for shipping direct to the customer.

UK clothing retail chain River Island is one example of a large company adapting its systems to suit omnichannel needs. The benefit to the customer is that you can do two jobs with one machine, you use less space in the warehouse and you can use the same mobile system for both requirements. “The ultrasonic sensor looks after the larger items, up to, roughly 60x60x90cm – the size of a washing machine, and most large items tend to be boxed,” he says. “Irregular items are usually smaller, which is where the infra-red sensor comes in, with a capability up to roughly 45x45x30cm, down to 2x2x2mm – objects like contact lenses, or small items of jewellery.” Switching the machine from ultrasonic to infra-red to accommodate a different range of product lines is seamless.



But are there products the system cannot identify? “We had one toymaking customer where a *Lord of the Rings* range had Gandalf’s staff, which was thin, long and quite troublesome,” he laughs, “but seriously, we are looking to identify accurately 80-90% of a product range, which we believe is an excellent result.”

EXDS has 650 installations in the UK and continues to grow. For customers with a smaller portfolio of products, perhaps 300-400 lines, EXDS offers a rental option, in which the CubiScan can be hired for a week in return. His five rental machines are thus in almost constant use.

What changes does he foresee in the DWS sector in the months and years ahead? “The big change will be if Europe adopts what they’ve started to do in the States,” he advises. “Formerly, all packages were priced by couriers and shippers on weight alone. The problem for them with that is that, say, a double mattress might not weigh very much but it’s inefficient to ship. A parcel of lead weights is the opposite. So they are now pricing based on dimensions and weight. If it catches on here, it will change things.”

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