

Preventing pallets from blowing their stacks



Stacking primary packs onto pallets is a task that requires careful attention to stack geometries. Ron Mines MAIP* looks at the potential pitfalls involved and suggests solutions.

EFFECTIVE optimisation of primary packs into trade unit packs which are then stacked on pallets often provides much-needed savings for FMCG and other suppliers of packaged goods.

To achieve such optimisation, suppliers first need to understand the requirements of their customers.

Retailers commonly state their requirements for pallet deck usage, which generally include 'no overhang' and maximum height. Such requirements are often linked to the weight of the trade unit.

The next step for suppliers is to evaluate current packaging and pallet loading to determine whether there is any opportunity to better use the pallet deck and cubic volume for the load.

I often find that the parameters allowed by the customers are not being fully utilised. For example, load stack heights set below the requirements or not fully utilising the pallet deck or weight allowance.

PALLET PITFALLS

Caution is required when attempting to optimise these values. Trade unit dimensions and

other characteristics can affect the ability of human or automated palletisers to achieve certain pallet patterns without creating un-packable patterns or inadvertent overhang.

Common pitfalls include trying to use too much of the pallet deck. This becomes more problematic the more trade units there are per layer.

Consideration also needs to be given to the physical variations in pallet deck dimensions that occur commonly due to age, wear, damage and fabrication variations.

Understanding the nature of the product and the packaging assists with determining whether load security can be enhanced by column stacking or alternating layers.

WEIGHING THE COSTS

Cost savings can be achieved when the weight of the load on the bottom layer of trade units is evaluated.

Further considerations often revolve around other methods of unitising the load, such as slip sheets, and the means of transporting the product to the customer, including alternative storage conditions.

Optimising the volume on the mode of

RETAILER REQUIREMENTS

Australia's two major retailers, Coles and Woolworths, provide their requirements for trade stack optimisation on their websites. For detailed information on their needs, go to:

■ **Coles:** www.supplierportal.coles.com.au

■ **Woolworths:** www.wowlink.com.au

transport can be of benefit. This includes limitations of truck deck and volume, as well as shipping container deck, volume and whether the shipping container is hand-loaded or pallet-loaded.

GET WITH THE PROGRAM

Palletising optimisation programs make this work quick and effective, providing for manipulation of the output to achieve cost savings through investigation of current or planned new packs.

Every FMCG business has differing needs and opportunities for improvement. With some focused training, users of these programs usually find many opportunities for savings.

Often these savings are found to be substantial, proving to be just what cost-stressed suppliers need to keep them competitive and profitable.

Technology is making this task easier. Now pallet configurations can be accessed quickly and cheaply, in the field, using a mobile phone or tablet.

A word of advice: when you determine new pallet load configurations, be sure to upload that information to your customer's website, to avoid complications and delays when delivering the next consignment. ■

**Ron Mines MAIP, known as the "Boxologist", is a consultant to the box and packaging industry. His 40-plus years of experience and close involvement in the industry provides considerable credibility among his peers.*



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