



PRINCIPAL
Logistics Technologies

GROCONTINENTAL 

Grocontinental's Principal system – In-DEX WMS



Grocontinental Ltd
25 Acre Site
Whitchurch, Shropshire UK

The Company

One of Britain's leading international storage and distribution companies, Grocontinental is based at its own purpose-developed 25-acre campus in Whitchurch, Shropshire in the North West of England and strategically located close to the heart of the national motorway network. With annual turnover of Stg£21 million and continuing to grow despite the economic conditions, this is still a family business now into the third generation of Grocott ownership. Founded by Victor in the 1930s, the business was continued by his widow Nellie then taken on and extended since 1950 by their son, the current Chairman Ray Grocott. His children Linda and David are joint Managing Directors.

Now a specialist full service logistics provider to the food distribution sector, Grocontinental has defied the prevailing industrial trends by investing and expanding in facilities, transport fleet and warehouse equipment and technology. Last year it invested Stg£3 million to construct a new 80,000 sq ft temperature-controlled warehouse to accommodate both chilled and frozen product. This increases Grocontinental capacity by 17,000 pallets to 120,000 pallet spaces and incorporates state of the art refrigeration and mobile storage racking.

The Business

Grocontinental today aims to provide a one-stop shop for all of its customers' requirements in the food product supply chain. In addition to temperature controlled storage and distribution the company offers a wider range of specialist services to meet specific customer requirements such as blast freezing, nitrogen tunnel rapid freezing and tempering. Multi-temperature storage chambers offer options from minus 38 to plus 12 degrees Centigrade. To facilitate its internationally trading customers, all Grocontinental warehouses are HM Customs bonded.



120,000 pallet spaces
Multi-temperature storage
5,000 daily pallet movements
24 X 7 X 365 operation

The busy Grocontinental facility is currently operating 24x7 at a level of 5,000 pallet movements daily with seasonal variations. Its services to customers include smart IT systems to monitor all stock locations and movements and the temperature integrity chain to all UK and EU food safety standards. Customers have real time access to information on all aspects of their product stock, in storage or in transit, through a secure Web portal. They can keep track of all of their orders throughout the supply chain and immediately see details of stock, dispatch, delivery and receipt.

The Systems Challenge

The fundamental challenge was to establish a comprehensive warehouse management system that would cover all aspects of Grocontinental operations and activities and offer a clear future development path. In 2006 an in-depth examination of all of the company's systems and their functionality was carried out. An expert consultant was retained to assist management in appraising systems and the potential software and suppliers in the market.

The existing WMS had functioned very well but Grocontinental had added some bespoke software for its own requirements, partly developed in-house or with the assistance of systems consultants. As the company developed a new range of value-added services it found that they required manual and paper-based administration, extending the amount of data re-entry in the business with the inevitable errors and gaps from time to time.

Grocontinental required a more flexible reporting system, giving clear visibility of stock movements as well as a sophisticated track and trace capability. Working with IT consultant, Grocontinental undertook a complete examination of its software in the light of its current and future business requirements. It examined alternative products in use in the sector and the options for integrating all of its business management systems. Eliminating as much paperwork as possible, especially in the warehouse and transport areas, was seen as an important objective.

"Overall, we saw flexibility as the key thing," explains Linda Grocott, Grocontinental Managing Director. "This is a fast moving and constantly changing sector. We needed to be able to introduce new services for our customers or change the ways we do things without being inhibited by the systems to administer them. There was also the consideration that the regulatory environment for the food and distribution sector had become much stricter and introduced the need for auditable traceability on behalf of our customers. So we went for an all-out upgrade of our WMS as the key to managing our core business service."

The Solution

The internal analysis of its systems and business needs extended over more than four months in late 2006 while in parallel the company management looked at a range of available software packages, including the latest and enhanced version of its existing WMS. The Grocontinental decision was to proceed with the In-DEX solution from Principal Logistics Technologies. "From our point of view this was a seriously big IT project all round," Linda Grocott recalls. "We have a small management team and of course the business was ongoing 24x7. We were also determined to take as long as necessary to ensure we made use of the functionality of the system to its maximum potential. So our key staff, our IT consultant and the experts from Principal worked on the development and tailoring of all aspects of the system to our specific requirements over a period of several months."

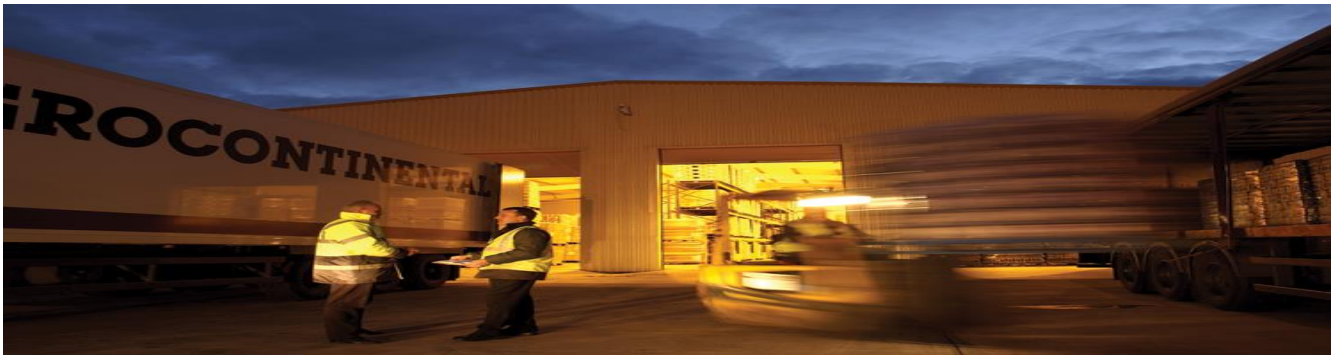
"the different business rules or unique requirements of each customer are also built in so that we automatically follow their product handling policies and instructions"



Linda Grocott
Joint Managing Director
Grocontinental Ltd.



120,000 Pallet Spaces
Chill, Frozen & Ambient



Cargill Meats Europe



Full of fresh ideas



Grocontinental manage some of the world's top brands in food manufacturing and packaging industries

The new **In-DEX** system went live in Grocontinental in September 2007 at the Whitchurch facility. It is used to control, monitor and record all stock from arrival at a Grocontinental warehouse through its storage life to delivery and acceptance to an end customer site with proof of delivery. The system runs all of the warehousing administrative processes through to invoicing. The company has retained its Stirling Transport Management software, the latest version of which has been integrated with **In-DEX**. From a stock management point of view, each Grocontinental truck is treated just like any other internal location except that it is on wheels. Product stays on the company system until it is delivered and Proof of Delivery confirmed which could be at the outward loading bay when handing over to an external haulier.

In essence, Grocontinental now has a fully integrated, dynamic and real time business management system built around its core warehouse activity. "Our work processes and business rules are built into the system, so that every step or action is guided. Any deviation is either not permitted or an alert is raised. Equally important is that the different business rules or unique requirements of each customer are also built in so that we automatically follow their product handling policies and instructions," Linda Grocott says.

She gives the example of an incoming load with pallets that should be split between frozen and chilled areas. "Each pallet has to be scanned individually and the system will literally refuse to accept it as stock into the chamber if the temperature regime is not correct." In the same way the bar code identifier on each pallet automatically triggers any specific instructions appropriate to the type of food, the customer's rules or Grocontinental conventions on, for example, pallet location or placement. The previous WMS was not capable of dealing with varying customer requirements while **In-DEX** can administer and ensure adherence to any number of specific requirements and business rules.

In the warehouse operations everything is controlled by the **In-DEX** system from the scanning of incoming pallets through put away and then pick and despatch. It captures and records everything required attribute of every pallet. The smart elements of the system include efficient routing, important when racks have to be moved, and a 'start from present location' pick list. Grocontinental aims to be flexible and dynamic in its operations, for example in responding to urgencies or changing the priority of orders.

"It has proven a robust way of ensuring that the operatives know exactly what they are doing," Linda Grocott explains. "The instructions pop up on their screens and they just work away. Behind the scenes, as it were, the system is filtering those instructions through a complex set of business rules. The customer preferences are there, of course, but so are our internal preferred ways of doing things such as location or rack heights. It means that we are consistent and efficient without having to rely on the experience and memory of the operatives. We have quite a big site, so the ability to move staff around to different working locations is important to us."

While **In-DEX** is now the operational core of the Grocontinental business it has to integrate with various other systems. The Grocontinental Web site offers a secure portal which allows customers to see their own stock position in real time and supply chain positions and generate their own reports on order status, best before dates, historic stockholding, and proof of delivery and any shortages or discrepancies. Secure communications between Grocontinental and its customers supported by the system include EDI and automatic email alerts of pre-set notifiable events such as minimum stock levels of a product. The invoicing information for each customer is generated by **In-DEX** and exported to the accounts system.

"All in all, when we were looking at our options we saw clearly that **In-DEX** would cover off most of our needs as we had then identified them," says Linda Grocott. "When we discussed our requirements with the team from Principal Logistics Technologies, we were impressed by their willingness and flexibility. They either showed us how the system could do what we needed or explained how they could tailor it for us. Getting the system specified and set up initially was a big job and extended over several months.

"But it also gave us the opportunity to re-design our warehouse coding and modify our ways of working both for greater efficiency and for flexibility" she adds. "Principal Logistics Technologies worked with us to develop exactly what we wanted and continued to be willing and flexible. At this stage, in fact, we probably use more of the functionality of **In-DEX** than almost any other customer but the result is a powerful and integrated system that has almost eliminated paper from the operational side of our business. We have complete visibility of all aspects of our operations and auditable records for our own and our customers' needs."



75 Concurrent In-DEX Users



5,000 Pallet Movements Daily

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