Rick Bestwick Rapid Growth with In-DEX WMS from Principal Logistics Technologies.

Located 5 minutes from junction 29 of the M1 motorway, enables Rick Bestwick's to reach 75% of the UK population in under 3 hours.

The Company

Over 35 years ago Rick Bestwick Ltd was formed. Originally processing wild game, Rick Bestwick Ltd became the largest wild game processors in the UK supplying to major retailers, manufacturers and wholesalers across the UK and Europe.

As a business they needed cold storage and they very quickly realised that there was a definite shortage of coldstore operators who actually understood and appreciated the needs of the food manufacturers especially the relationship between themselves and the major retailers.

This led to the building of their first purpose built public coldstore in 1998 to serve the needs of its own and other food product manufacturers, importers and retailers.

Through investment and acquisition, by 2010, the company's coldstore facilities exceeded 30,000 pallets. This was also the year that the Wild Game Operation was sold which enabled greater focus on the coldstore and distribution operations.

In 2013 Kevin Hancock, formerly Commercial Director with 16 years' service to the company, acquired the shares of Rick and Pam Bestwick along with investors Magnavale Ltd. Kevin Hancock became Managing Director of Rick Bestwick Ltd and along with further investment and acquisitions raised the coldstore profile to 62,000 pallet spaces at Holmewood and a further 55,000 pallet spaces at Scunthorpe offering multi temperature chambers and various added value services.

The 200-employee company continues to re-investing in an expanding set of businesses that has been growing at over 10% annually despite the economic downturn. It now has two food processing plants and three cold stores as well as an ever growing fleet of refrigerated trucks, fitted out to its own specifications including temperature monitoring and satellite tracking.

The Business

The Rick Bestwick cold storage and distribution operation is centred in the company's Chesterfield campus with two separate cold stores, purpose built in 1998, and a satellite facility in Sheffield completed in 2005. Located just five minutes from the M1 motorway, its deliveries can reach over 75% of the UK population in under three hours. The facilities operate 24x7 and extend to 117,000 pallet capacity, both general cold storage and variable temperature chambers for specific customers or food types.

Additional services include blast freezing and up-tempering, using microwave technology. These specialised services are complemented by order picking and assembly on behalf of customers and other pre-distribution services include inverting of pallets, re-packing and labelling, tray filling, shrink wrapping and hand balling.


The Systems Challenge

While Rick Bestwick Ltd invested in a Warehouse Management System from the opening of its first cold store in 1998, the software was very limited in functionality and after a few years began to be outgrown by the developing business and the changing requirements of the customer mix. "We soldiered on without huge problems because we had good staff in the stores and got to know our customers and their needs very well," recalls operations manager Neil Bestwick, the son of the founder who joined the firm on the storage and distribution side early this decade.

"That is still characteristic, because we are in truth a small family business and both staff and customers tend to stay with us. But it became increasingly apparent and frustrating that our computer system could not deliver the features and efficiencies we needed and we could not go on just compensating for this with the experience and knowledge of the people working here."

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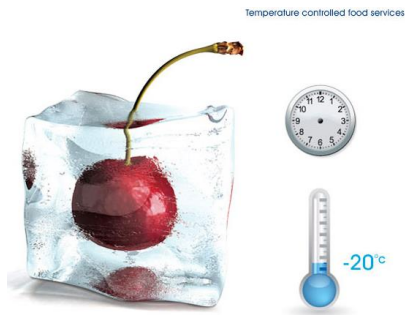
Rick Bestwick's can safely bring frozen product to chill in 3 minutes

Entrusted with the task of sourcing a better solution, Neil Bestwick and his colleagues found out what other companies in the sector were using and accepted some product presentations. "We visited a couple of sites for demonstrations and to talk to users in similar lines of business. The whole process dragged on for a few months, partly because we had to find budget and also because we were actually very busy. It fairly quickly became clear that the 'winner' was Principal Logistics Technologies and its **In-DEX** warehouse management software.

"Its existing users were enthusiastic and when we asked Principal Logistics Technologies questions like *'Can it do XYZ?'* the answers were almost always an immediate demonstration of exactly how." Once or twice, he remembers, the response was *'Maybe not exactly but what we could do is....'* "The point is that we felt from the beginning that we could have confidence in both the supplier and the system."

The Solution

The company signed up for the **In-DEX** warehouse management solution from Principal Logistics Technologies in 2008 and after a period of work tailoring the software to the specific requirements of the Rick Bestwick business the new system went live in January 2009. "We were our own bottleneck for a while in getting it started," Neil Bestwick said. "As usual our small management team were fairly stretched and the one-off exercise in stocktaking and transferring everything onto the new system was a bit daunting. In due course we scheduled a 24-hour closure, threw everyone at it and got the job done."

In the first couple of weeks with the new system quite a few small issues arose, mostly to do with people's unfamiliarity. "They were quickly resolved, everyone got used to it and since then we have quite simply never looked back," Neil Bestwick says. "We now run our business entirely on the **In-DEX** system, which looks after everything from goods received to picking and despatch to preparing the invoice information."

Freezer Specification mobile computers provide operatives with optimised work instructions and provide full traceability and KPI reporting

Reflecting the relatively small size of the staff, Rick Bestwick has just 12 **In-DEX** licences to cover operational users 24x7. "On the management side, we can see clearly at all times what stock we are holding overall and for each customer. We generate our own internal reports regularly and give customers whatever reports they wish, usually weekly."

The **In-DEX** system is the standalone warehouse management and logistics system in Rick Bestwick and is not linked to any other software. So far, there has been no customer demand for integration

or automated links with the Rick Bestwick stock system, although such connections are increasingly common in food distribution and the software provides for them. "We are aware of these capabilities in the **In-DEX** software," Neil Bestwick says, "but for the moment it would not really be any great advantage. We can answer any queries by email or phone in a matter of a few minutes, because the information is readily called up from the system. In fact I don't think we have ever had to send someone into the warehouse to check anything."

The **In-DEX** software takes over from the point when pallets are received at the bays and scanned into the warehouse management system. From then on the owner, contents, quantity, location and all other relevant information such as BB and other key date codes are all recorded in the database. The fundamentals of the **In-DEX** system are the bar coding of all goods at the appropriate pallet/case level, usually involving the customers' bar coding and any other identification. But new unique identification codes can be generated by the system as required.

"Coding detail will vary from customer to customer, for example one company's 'Mushroom 15mm' will be another's 'Vegetables 3003' but where necessary or useful we can add our coding and apply our own labels," Neil Bestwick says. From that entry point on they are fully traceable in our system and can be matched to any other food safety or administrative systems.

In daily operation, the customers 'order' their goods from the warehouse, principally by email. The items are entered in **In-DEX** to generate the pick lists for the forklift operators in the stores. "The really smart things here include the fact that the **In-DEX** system automatically incorporates the relevant customer's individual pre-set business rules, industry best practice such as FIFO and any parameters we might set such as placement of different types of product."

Another key point is that **In-DEX** collates and assigns the pick lists to ensure the most efficient routing of trucks in the warehouse. It can also as part of that process minimize the movement of mobile racking whether loading or picking. The operators use both short and long range scanners to read the pallet labels for verification and to feed the movement back into the system.

"Technically we have been operating at 105% of capacity in recent months," Neil Bestwick said, "partly by utilising our buffer capacity and also by temporarily moving pallets between the two warehouses, luckily just around 150 yards, and using any spare space on the floor. We have no problem doing that solely because **In-DEX** enables us to keep constant and accurate track of what is where."

At the end of each week there is one task that Neil Bestwick reserves for himself. "We use **In-DEX** to generate the invoices for every customer based on what pallets are in stock and what movements occurred during the week. It's a bit of a chore, but I prefer to go through those invoices before they are sent. Knowing the customers well I can make sure that anything unusual is checked and then explained or notified to them. The customer should never be surprised by the invoice, I reckon. Apart from preserving good relations, we do not want to give any excuse for delayed payment."

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