



Leading Food Industry Storage and Distribution Company Chooses ProWMS to Control, Monitor and Record Stock

Grocontinental Whitchurch, subsequently Agro Merchants Whitchurch and acquired by Americold in 2020, is one of the UK's leading global food industry logistics providers. It works with many global brands, primarily serving the dairy, meat and bakery sectors. The company's services include inbound and outbound UK and European transport and premium multi-temperature warehousing. It achieves the highest levels of quality, technical and regulatory requirements exceeding the expectations demanded of this fast-moving food industry.

The business operates from a purpose-built 35-acre site in Whitchurch, Shropshire with 165,000 pallet spaces of multi-temperature storage from -20°C to +12°C including ambient, chilled and frozen and blast freezing. Its warehouse accommodates chilled and frozen products and incorporates innovative refrigeration and mobile storage racking systems.

THE BUSINESS

- Chill and frozen multi-temperature storage: frozen, chilled, ambient
- Value-added services including blast freezing, tempering, cheese maturation, de-boxing, co-packing
- Transportation and distribution services
- 5,000 daily pallet movements

KEEPING THE FOOD INDUSTRY ON THE MOVE

AGRO Merchants Group/Grocontinental (Americold) provides a one-stop-shop for all customer requirements across the food product supply chain. In addition to temperature-controlled storage and distribution, it offers specialist services to meet specific customer needs like blast freezing, nitrogen tunnel rapid freezing and tempering. All warehouses are HM Customs bonded in support of global customer needs.

The company operates 24x7x365 handling 5,000 daily pallet movements with seasonal variations. It uses intelligent IT systems to monitor stock locations and ensures that the temperature integrity along the movement chain meets all UK and EU food safety standards. Its customers have real-time access to information about all aspects of their product stock, in storage or in transit, via a secure web portal. This enables tracking of all orders throughout the supply chain and for them to immediately view details of stock, dispatch, delivery and receipt.

THE CHALLENGE

The key challenge was to establish a comprehensive warehouse management system able to manage all aspects of business operations, and with a clear future development path. An in-depth analysis of the company's systems and functionality was undertaken. An expert IT consultant was retained to assist the management team in appraising available systems, software and suppliers.

The existing warehouse management system was functioning well but, over time, the company had added bespoke software supporting its own requirements, developed in-house or via IT consultants. In developing a range of value-added services – including co-packing and cheese scraping - it found that excessive manual and paper-based administration was needed. This extended the amount of data re-entry required across the business and resulted in errors.

The company required a more flexible reporting system, providing clear visibility of stock movements as well as a sophisticated track-and-trace capability. Working with the IT consultant, the company undertook a comprehensive systems and software review, considering its current and future business requirements. It examined alternative products and the option of integrating all of its business management systems. A key objective was to eliminate as much paperwork as possible, especially in the warehouse and transport areas.



THE SOLUTION

The internal systems and business needs analysis exceeded four months. In parallel, the management team considered a range of available software packages, including the latest and enhanced version of its existing WMS. The board's decision was to proceed with the ProWMS warehouse management system from Principal Logistics Technologies.

ProWMS was deployed at the Whitchurch site. It controls, monitors and records all stock from arrival at a 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 retained its existing Stirling Transport Management software, the latest version of which was seamlessly integrated with ProWMS.

From a stock management position, each of the company's trucks is treated just like any other internal location - except that it is on wheels. Products remain on the company system until delivered and proof-of-delivery is confirmed, which could be at the outward loading bay when handing over to an external haulier.

"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."

**AGRO Merchants
(Grocontinental/
Americold)**



RESULTS SUMMARY

- A fully integrated real-time warehouse management system was deployed
- Individual business rules were applied aligning with customer policies
- Efficient stock routing and full control from inbound pallet scanning to putaway, then pick-and-despatch achieved
- Value-added services including co-packing and cheese scraping added
- Faster goods inwards via reduced paperwork and administration time with ProWMS document management
- Significant increase in operative consistency and efficiency

DELIVERING A FULLY INTEGRATED, REAL-TIME WAREHOUSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

AGRO Merchants Group/Grocontinental (Americold) was left with a fully integrated and dynamic real-time warehouse management system built around its core activity. A key requirement was that the different work processes and business rules, or unique requirements of each customer, had to be integrated so that each step, or action, was guided.

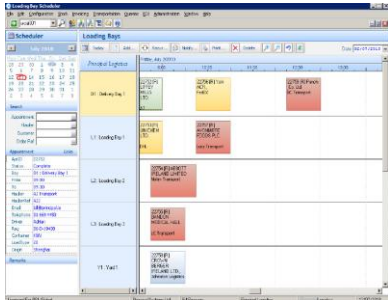
Deviations are either rejected or an alert raised: for example, when an incoming load with pallets needing to be split between frozen and chilled areas. Each pallet must be scanned individually, and the system will literally refuse to accept it as stock into the chamber if the temperature regime is incorrect. In the same way the pallet barcode identifier automatically triggers any specific instructions appropriate to the type of food, the customer's rules, or the company's conventions on, for example, pallet location or placement.

The previous warehouse management system could not handle varying customer requirements. ProWMS administers, and ensures adherence to, any number of specific requirements and business rules.

"It has proven a robust way of ensuring that the operatives know exactly what they are doing. The instructions pop up on their screens and they just work away. Behind the scenes, 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 our operatives. We have quite a big site, so the ability to move staff around to different working locations is important"

AGRO Merchants Group/Grocontinental (Americold)

**174,300 cubic metres
Whitchurch, site with
165,000 pallet spaces
of multi-temperature
storage**



A redesign opportunity: The process gave the customer an opportunity to redesign its warehouse coding and to modify its working methods and processes, both for increased efficiency and flexibility. In fact, the company ended up using more ProWMS functionality than almost any other customer. The deployment of a powerful and integrated system has virtually eliminated paper from the operational side of the business. It has enabled complete visibility across all aspects of warehousing operations with auditable records for the company and its customers' needs.

ProWMS Yard Management and Document Imaging modules deployed: All inbound, or outbound, loads must first request a booking time slot. Once the confirmation is made, ProWMS Yard Management automatically emails a confirmation to the relevant party(ies). Drivers arriving onsite must present the confirmation which date and time stamps their arrival and starts the goods-in process. Transactions in ProWMS can be linked to these bookings. Any driver documentation is removed from the process upon arrival by the security office scanning hardcopy documentation using ProWMS Document Imaging – this links the, now electronic, copy of the paperwork to the relevant transactions in ProWMS.

Robustness and flexibility: A further key customer requirement was robustness and flexibility. This is a fast moving and constantly changing business and the company needed to be able to introduce new services for its customers, or to change the ways it does things without complexities or delay. There was also significant consideration given to the fact that the regulatory environment for the food and distribution sector had become more stringent, introducing the need for fully auditable traceability on behalf of customers

Seamless integration: While ProWMS became the operational core of the business it needed to seamlessly integrate with various other internal and customer-based systems. The company's website features a secure portal allowing customers to review their stock position in real-time, their supply chain positions, and to generate reports about order status, best before dates, historic stockholding, proof-of-delivery and shortages or discrepancies.

Secure communications between the company and its customers include EDI and automatic email alerts of pre-set notifiable events such as minimum product stock levels. Customer invoicing information is generated by ProWMS and exported to the company accounts system.



**Paper virtually
eliminated from the
operational side of
the business**

**ProWMS Yard
Management and
Document Imaging
modules
– speeding up Goods
inwards and goods
outwards processes**



"The customer was delighted with the final systems deployment. Everything is controlled by ProWMS, from the scanning of incoming pallets through to putaway and then pick-and-despatch. The systems capture and record everything required on every pallet. This includes intelligent elements such as efficient routing – this is important when racks need moving - and a 'start from present stock location' pick list. It was imperative that the system was operationally flexible and dynamic. For example, when responding to urgencies or changing order priorities."

Joe O'Shea, Director, Principal Logistics Technologies

ABOUT PRINCIPAL LOGISTICS TECHNOLOGIES

For over 30 years, Principal Logistics Technologies has been a leader in the design and delivery of innovative warehouse management software (WMS) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) software. Our technology and services optimise operational performance, reduce OpEx, and increase revenue for 3PL, distribution, wholesale, manufacturing, and retail warehouse businesses.

The company supports enterprise-level and multinational businesses with complex single and multisite operations spanning 3PL, chemicals & hazardous goods, hard & soft commodities, chill picking, cold storage, cross docking, eCommerce, FMCG, pharmaceuticals & healthcare and more. We operate from offices in Dublin in Ireland and Manchester and Birmingham in the UK.