

Overview

Customer: Environmentally conscious producer of coffee products and plant-based milks, including additive-free and specialty brands for supermarkets, barista and ready to drink markets. The company supplies to UK destinations in large volumes with deliveries to major supermarket RDCs, wholesalers including Amazon and independent distributors, and also exports worldwide.

Requirement

A complete end to end 3PL logistics solution encompassing collection of ambient finished drinks from production site, pallet receipt, storage, picking/contract packing and delivery via the most appropriate route to market or container loading for export.

Storage within a BRCGS warehousing environment able to provide positive hold and release, customer specific contract packing, re-labelling, re-boxing or restacking to different pallet configurations.

Very high service KPIs, agility, transparency, EDI and technical capability
·Excellent communication and multi-level relationships with all stakeholders; customers, production site, other suppliers and container operators' delivery points.

Challenges

Willmotts won this contract due to our proven record of consistently high service levels and we needed a detailed understanding of requirements and resources to handle existing levels of business, but also to build in scalability and flexibility to allow for future growth.

A key element of the operation would be to provide 24/7 capability for prompt full load end of line collections streamlined to match production schedules, allied with close liaison with the production site on sku and batch data and positive release dates.

Our existing warehouses were already nearing capacity, so we had to create a tightly-managed BRCGS storage solution for 4000+ pallets, with sufficient flex to handle promotions or new launches and an area for contract packing.

Our transport and pallet network system had sufficient fleet resources to cope with the additional distribution work, with the addition of another network night trunking vehicle however the commencement of this contract coincided with a national driver shortage, and this was challenging in itself.

Approach

Our approach was to become a seamless extension of their business, so our teams worked closely to ensure a collaborative implementation across all operational areas of the business; warehousing, transport and pallet network - but also to include and align the requirements of quality, compliance, sales and accounts departments in both companies.

We focused on making the customer experience a positive one, so that they in turn could enhance their own customers' experience, giving their business a competitive edge and we expanded our customer service team to back up our operational offering. Our onboarding process was very in-depth with a staged transition over 6 weeks to allow training and product familiarisation with warehouse employees, combined with daily online implementation meetings with our customer.

Solution

The issue of warehousing capacity was resolved with the acquisition of another warehouse locally and the transfer of several smaller customers' stock out of our Waterlip warehouse to create sufficient space. A further long-term plan for a dedicated new build warehouse was brought forward to ensure capacity for further growth. We liaised very closely with the customer on work processes to ensure accuracy and timeliness of contract packing to order and put in place documented Standard Operating Procedures covering all operational activities. Our warehouse pickers were trained on product-specific reboxing and labelling with a focus on batch and date detail.

Using cloud-based tools, our IT capability allowed the automation of many simple processes to reduce administration and the potential errors of manual data input and to provide complete transparency of order or delivery status for our customer. Our Warehouse Management System has full EDI and API functionality and provides detailed inventory management reporting, augmented by an online portal giving the customer real-time stock and movement data. Additionally, we installed a booking interface allowing third party suppliers and container operators to have visibility of available collection and delivery slots and book times at their convenience.

We set up EDI links with the production site, so all SSCC data is transmitted directly into our WMS ahead of collection and confirmed by barcode scanning of labels on receipt. This includes positive hold and release data, which can then be quickly allocated to orders once the release is confirmed.

To ease the flow of day-to-day communications, we also set up a specific email inbox and online folders, shared with the customer and updated regularly by all parties, so that all routine communications could be easily handled by operations staff and any exceptions could be quickly identified and resolved, keeping service levels and KPIs consistently high.

Conclusion

The outline requirements of this contract were an excellent fit for Willmotts, given our existing resources and expertise in FMCG markets and we were able to quickly assimilate the new work into the business, with no disruption to customer deliveries. This contract has further developed with Willmotts handling delivery to new customers including a major supermarket launch. Understanding the huge effort and commitment customers make to secure this type of new business, we liaised closely on the portal booking in process, ASN creation, freight presentation and labelling to ensure all deliveries went in successfully.

We continue to develop customer-specific procedures, for example, routine PI checks tailored to batch or MLOR rotations and will further develop IT links between our companies.

At a strategic level we are working with our customer on future production planning, stock levels, launches, online fulfilment and contract packing requirements. Importantly, we also continue to monitor and further reduce our carbon footprint through investment in the newest vehicles, efficient planning and resource utilisation that reflect our customers' own sustainability ethos, so that our companies can continue to grow in partnership in an environmentally responsible manner.