

Omnichannel warehouses with 70,000 SKUs

Fashion retailer Espace des Marques has revamped its two installations in La Boissière-des-Landes, France — in the throes of the pandemic — with the aim of boosting its growth prospects and picking efficiency. Mecalux has implemented an omnichannel solution to store and manage its 70,000 SKUs: shelves with raised walkways, conveyors for boxes, the Easy WMS warehouse management system and the Multi Carrier Shipping module. As a result, Espace des Marques has doubled its goods receipt productivity, tripled its dispatches and reduced mistakes made in order prep.

Country: **France** | Sector: **e-commerce**



ADVANTAGES

- **Control and traceability:** the WMS knows the exact location of the 70,000 SKUs the minute they arrive at the warehouse and organises them logically to facilitate the work of the operators.
- **Tripled number of orders dispatched:** the warehouse layout and organisation of operations are designed to streamline the preparation and dispatch of 8,000 orders every week.
- **Resource optimisation:** the company has increased its throughput in goods receipt, picking and dispatch operations while employing the same number of workers.

Major brands at competitive prices

Every season, thousands of customers renew their wardrobe with the latest in shoes, trousers, jumpers, jackets and shirts offered by Espace des Marques. This firm sells fashion items from the major market brands at an affordable price via its website (espace-des-marques.com) and various physical shops as well as the marketplaces.

Founded in 2007, Espace des Marques has steadily grown. It began with a mere 30 m² shop in Jard-sur-Mer, and today, it boasts eight shops all across France. Based on an omnichannel strategy, its future outlook is promising: over the next few years, it will continue to open more boutiques and bolster its online business. Its goal is to diversify its sales channels, serving an increasing number of customers in the shortest time possible.





Overhauling wardrobes and logistics

Johan Legrand, founder and CEO of Espace des Marques, explains, “In recent years, our turnover has risen — as have our numbers of SKUs and orders — due to our strategy of opening new stores and expanding our website. However, not only did we lack space; we also needed to optimise storage and picking, streamline operations and ramp up productivity. We had to change.”

Before, all management was carried out manually — pencil and paper in hand — from product distribution through to order prep. Goods organisation is one of the main operations of any warehouse. Optimising this was one of Espace des Marques’ goals, as this would speed up all other operations.

Johan Legrand recalls how the installation used to be arranged, indicating, “Aisles were designated alphabetically, and we stored products by brand: aisle A was assigned to a particular brand, aisle B to another, and so on. This led to several problems, because some of the brands had so many products that they didn’t all fit in the same aisle and had to be relocated. Plus, it caused us to depend on the memory of the operators, so when one of them was absent, it was really difficult to locate the merchandise. Between this and the fact that we sorted the products based on size and colour as opposed to barcode, we were making too many mistakes.”

There was also room for improvement when it came to picking. Development Manager Vincent Beaufreton says, “We had a printed-out list that workers would use to gather the SKUs that made up each order. However, they would spend a lot of time locating each item. It was a very tedious operation.”

Determined to make a change for the better, in 2019, Espace des Marques opened two new

2,700 m² warehouses in La Boissière-des-Landes. There, 70,000 SKUs are stored, and operators prepare and dispatch all offline and online orders, from the company’s brick-and-mortar shops and website, respectively.

“At first, one of the installations was dedicated specifically to online orders, while the other supplied the shops. Our logistics systems are quickly evolving, and organisation of the two warehouses has been reworked. Now, our installations are more specialised,” says the Development Manager.

Currently, one of the warehouses is reserved for footwear, while the other is allocated to clothing items. “If an order contains both garments and shoes, these items are prepared separately in their respective installations and then consolidated in one of the two,” he adds.

To fit out these warehouses, the company decided to work with Mecalux because, in the words of Johan Legrand, “They made us an

all-in-one proposal that included the storage, transport and management systems. We were looking for a single provider that would supply all the solutions for both installations. Finally, I’d point out the confidence Mecalux’s technical team inspired in us. When undertaking such a large-scale project as this, you have to surround yourself with the best professionals and competent people you can trust.”

The two warehouses are composed of picking shelves with raised walkways forming three floors. “With these new installations, we’ve solved our space-shortage issue; that is, they’ve tripled the surface area. But another problem then came up: how to move the goods between the different floors. To solve it, Mecalux installed a box conveyor system and a lift that connect the various building levels and speed up goods transfers,” explains Vincent Beaufreton.

“Our next challenge was SKU management,” says Beaufreton. The company needed a





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specialised logistics management tool. With a warehouse management system (WMS), it would be able to improve stock control and reduce errors. Thus, it installed Easy WMS from Mecalux in its on-premise modality, along with the Multi Carrier Shipping Software module, designed to expedite the order packaging, labelling and dispatch process.

Advanced management with a WMS

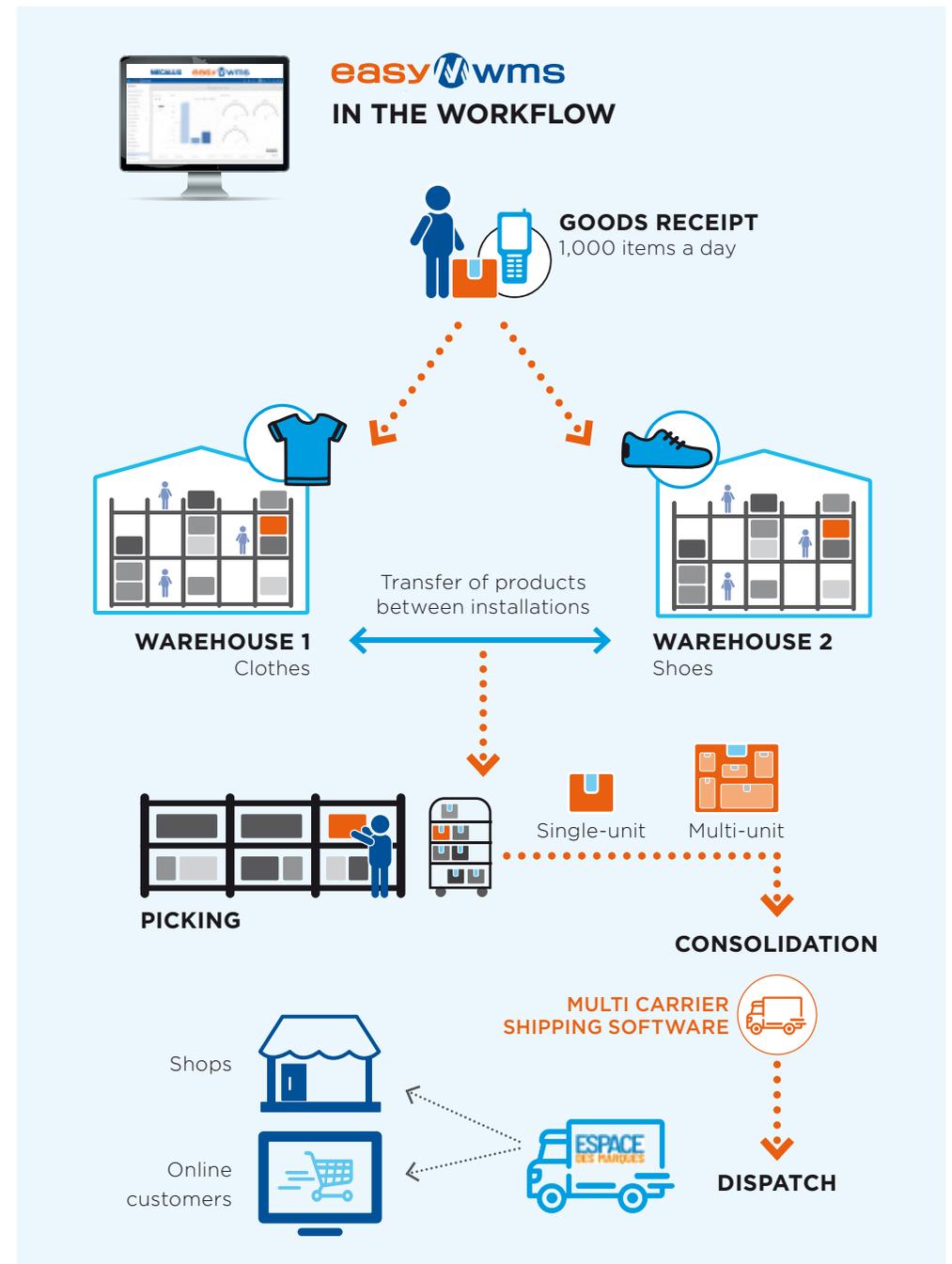
Espace des Marques implemented Mecalux's Easy WMS in both its warehouses with very clear goals: to organise, control and optimise products and operations, as well as save time and eliminate errors.

This WMS was deployed in two phases a year apart: first in one installation and then, in the other. Furthermore, Easy WMS was started-up in the second warehouse remotely due to the COVID-19 health crisis. During the

lockdown — and to ensure the utmost safety of the Espace des Marques and Mecalux teams — preparations, training, tests and adjustments were carried out by means of remote communication.

“The commissioning was a major step because this was completely new for us, and we had a lot of questions about how it would unfold. But with the constant support of Mecalux's technical team, everything was done really quickly. It was also easy to learn how to use the WMS and all its features,” notes Vincent Beaufreton.

Easy WMS has been integrated with Espace des Marques' XL Soft ERP and the PrestaShop e-commerce platform to ensure that both systems transfer data on how to optimally carry out the various operations in the two installations. Coordination between the ERP and the WMS is vital for always hav-



The different floors with shelves and walkways are automatically connected via a vertical lift for boxes

ing the necessary goods on hand to provide good service and avoid stockouts.

“We’ve been learning to use Easy WMS by working with it day to day. Our assessment of it is very positive; this tool meets our needs, without a doubt,” affirms Espace des Marques’ Development Manager. Easy WMS intervenes in all operations taking place in both warehouses, from the moment the goods arrive from the suppliers until the orders are dispatched to be delivered to customers:

Goods receipt

“Easy WMS monitors the SKUs more accurately, and we no longer make as many mistakes as we did before. This tool lets us manage stock more effectively,” guarantees Vincent Beaufreton.

“Goods receipt is one of the working areas where we’ve noticed the most improvement: now, we’re twice as fast,” he enthuses.

Every day, each operator receives an average of 1,000 products to identify and check (in summer, this figure can rise to 2,000). “Before

having Easy WMS, a worker could process 500 items at the most,” he emphasises

Identifying and verifying the merchandise is fundamental for performing the other warehouse tasks efficiently. “Previously, for example, we might buy 100 t-shirts and receive only 80. Without contrasting what we had ordered with what the suppliers actually sent us, it could take us weeks, even months, to realise there were deviations. By then, it was impossible to trace the error back to its source,” explains Vincent Beaufreton.

Once the products are identified, the WMS sorts them according to whether they are shoes or clothes. It then assigns them a location taking into account several criteria: SKU, model, size, turnover, etc. Easy WMS organises the goods in both installations in a logical way that optimises operator movements and, at the same time, facilitates storage and picking tasks.

Order preparation

“Since we built these two warehouses, we’ve opened four more shops and doubled our on-line business,” declares Vincent Beaufreton.

Thanks to the proper distribution of the goods, the organisation of the operators and the instructions from Easy WMS, the firm can dispatch around 8,000 orders a week for both its brick-and-mortar establishments and customers of espace-des-marques.com and the marketplaces.

When preparing orders, each worker is assigned to a specific floor, where he/she picks the products that make up the orders and places them on the conveyor. The conveyor brings the goods to the lift. This, in turn, carries them down to the lower floor, where they are moved to the consolidation area.

For online orders, operators follow an order grouping method, which consists of picking



Shelving with raised walkways: ideal for e-commerce warehouses

Espace des Marques’ two installations are equipped with picking shelves upon which elevated aisles are supported. This solution provides the following advantages:

- » **Leveraged height.** The useful storage space has been tripled to house more items.
- » **Direct access.** Goods can be handled easily, which translates into greater speed in storage and picking tasks.
- » **Versatility.** The locations adapt to the broad range of available products, from boxes containing shoes to a wide variety of garments of various models and sizes.
- » **Fewer movements.** Conveyors connect the different warehouse floors and end at the consolidation zone. Thus, operators do not have to travel throughout the installation to prepare orders, as they work only in the area assigned to them.

SKUs for several orders on the same run. They follow precise instructions from Easy WMS, which shows them where to go, which item to locate and what quantity to remove. As for orders for establishments, each worker is assigned to an order (a shop). These comprise large orders with many lines, so operators prepare the part of the order corresponding to their particular area. This way, five or six employees can work on the same order. “We still don’t have statistics on the error reduction percentage in picking. What we do know is that the returns rate for our online customers has gone down. These aren’t necessarily due to mistakes, but rather to changes in size, colour, model, etc.,” indicates Vincent Beaufreton.

Consolidation and dispatch

Once the products have arrived at the dispatch area, Easy WMS organises and sorts them by order, taking into account whether they are for shops or online customers.

Following that, the Multi Carrier Shipping Software module manages the packaging process, telling operators which articles to package and how to group them (in one or multiple parcels). “We’ve improved this process to the point where we’ve eliminated shipping errors,” effuses the Development Manager. The module knows in advance which carrier will distribute each order and prints a personalised label for each of them that includes the destination and tracking number. “This has saved us a lot of time in preparing and dispatching orders,” adds Vincent Beaufreton.

Multi Carrier Shipping Software is also integrated with the transport agencies that deliver the company’s orders (Chronopost, Colissimo and the firm’s own delivery lorry), which speeds up dispatches and prevents mistakes. When carriers arrive at the warehouse, they already know the number of boxes that make up each order, so they



merely have to pick them up. “Thanks to our new logistics strategy and the automation and digitalisation Easy WMS has given us, we can ship three times as many orders as before using the same number of operators,” declares Beaufreton.

Dispatches are organised so as to guarantee that orders are shipped as quickly as possible. Vincent Beaufreton explains, “Colissimo picks up orders twice a day: at 7:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m. Orders placed in the afternoon and at night are the first to go out for delivery in the morning. We also prioritise orders that arrive from Amazon and our Premium online customers, shipping them via Chronopost within 24 hours.”

Latest trends in digitised management

Espace des Marques has two warehouses in La Boissière-des-Landes with quick, efficient operations to serve as many customers as possible. With Mecalux’s comprehensive solution — consisting of shelves with raised walkways, box conveyors, the Easy WMS warehouse management system

and the Multi Carrier Shipping Software module — the firm can now dispatch triple the number of orders while allocating the same resources.

Espace des Marques has increased its supply chain productivity with the aim of strengthening its development prospects. According to Johan Legrand, “We have a master plan for 2024: we aim to open about 20 shops in France and bring in a turnover of more than 10 million euros from the website. The next step would be international expansion, so we need to analyse how to ship orders to other countries, such as Germany. We also expect to distribute up to 4,000 items a day in August, our busiest month.”

To do so, the company must be equipped with scalable logistics systems with optimised processes. The two warehouses in La Boissière-des-Landes stand out for their control and efficiency. The WMS knows the exact location of the 70,000 SKUs and strictly supervises storage and picking tasks to prevent any possibility of error.