

# Operations

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# Delight shoppers through behind-the-scenes efficiencies

Customers are best-served when cross-channel fulfilment works as it should, supported by well-specified retail systems, writes **Chloe Rigby**

AS ECOMMERCE AND MULTICHANNEL shopping grow, the volume of goods that must be in the right place at the right time to fulfil ever-more ambitious delivery promises is growing too. The pressure is on to ensure that the item sent to the store for a click-and-collect order is there when the customer arrives, that same-day delivery takes place smoothly, and that returns are handled efficiently, regardless of whether the goods are taken back to the store or sent to the warehouse. In response, the back-end systems that underpin these multichannel services, now taken for granted by shoppers, are evolving to become more sophisticated. They're enabling retailers of all sizes to offer their customers more seamless customer experiences

“ Retailers and brands are competing as shoppers spend less in challenging economic times ”

by maintaining the smooth running of the supply chain, from dropshipping and warehouse operations to supplying the store and enabling cross-channel services such as ship from store or click-and-collect. These in turn underpin ever-faster services, such as same-day delivery.

Order management systems are used to track and manage the location of goods both in the supply chain and for shipping to the end customer, while warehouse management systems (WMS) are used to organise the flow of goods through the warehouse. By integrating WMS systems with enterprise resource planning systems (ERP), retailers can better manage their warehouse operations, cutting costs and enabling fast, accurate picking.

Database management and web hosting services underpin operations. Scalable systems enable smaller businesses to buy into them either through using third-

party logistics providers or by paying for a smaller number of users. Product information management (PIM) systems are now able to tie together master data and product data in more sophisticated ways, which underpins personalisation.

The more data such a system can store – from where an item is to where a customer is, as well as the product details that feed websites and keep them consistent – the more they enable commerce systems to show customers the items that they are searching for and to have them delivered in the most convenient way. Once that retailers can understand what someone bought and from what location, they can make better recommendations, encouraging customer loyalty.

Leading retailers are now moving to automate more of their warehousing and warehousing processes so that they can handle greater product volumes, especially at peak trading times. At John Lewis, ranked Elite in IRUK Top500 research, peak 2016 proved the first big test for its new £150m automated, centralised warehousing at Magna Park, Milton Keynes. Meanwhile, German retailer Otto, an Elite retailer in IREU research, uses machine learning technology from Blue Yonder to replenish its warehouse through automated ordering and to speed up delivery from drop-ship suppliers.

## Looking ahead

In the future, retailers will be called on to deliver more personalisation. Early preparations for that could mean collecting and organising more information. Ensuring that data stored is in line with GDPR requirements will give companies a head start on their competition. Many traders will also start to plan for the UK leaving the EU with few concessions, which will mean taking control of more information as another layer of administration around customs duties and other costs looks set to come into place. More widely, supply chains are likely to get more

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## Ten issues to consider

**1** **EXTEND TO THE STORE:** Cross-channel customers demand cross-channel services. Bear in mind consumer appetite for click-and-collect as well as the ability to return goods to the store when selecting systems.

**2** **TIMELY DELIVERIES:** Order management systems enable omnichannel services such as ship from store. As retailers enable ever-faster delivery times, within an hour or even less, expect to see demand for such services rise.

**3** **LEGACY ISSUES:** Many retailers will operate new systems alongside older legacy ones. Find out ahead of purchase how any system will integrate and how easy it will be to migrate data.

**4** **PLAN RESOURCES:** Dedicated project teams will help ensure that integration and migration happen in an orderly fashion.

**5** **DON'T OVERSPEC:** High-end ERP or WMS systems give the control of data and resources that retailers require but can also be complex and costly. Find the one that's right for the business.

**6** **THINK FLEXIBLE:** A growing business may need to add many new stores, warehouses and even new geographies in the future. Flexible systems will enable it to adapt when that happens.

**7** **CONSIDER PEAK:** Retailers may not need the capacity for peak all year round but it's important to ensure systems have the agility to respond at the busiest times.

**8** **SMALLER BUSINESS?** Large companies may consider a WMS or PMI to be essential but smaller ones may not easily justify the expense. SaaS systems can enable companies of all sizes to buy into a solution that meet their needs.

**9** **MOBILE CUSTOMERS:** On-the-go shoppers equipped with supercomputer smartphones are more likely to buy or reserve stock for super-speedy collection. Screwfix has cut its click-and-collect time to just five minutes. Consider expectations such as these when planning resources.

**10** **REMEMBER RETURNS:** The ability to take items back and get fast returns is important to customers. Ensure there's support for fast and flexible processes.

complicated in the light of Brexit. Therefore, retailers that plan ahead with the systems they'll need to communicate with their suppliers will be more likely to manage the process smoothly.

Ultimately, retailers and brands respond to customer demand. That looks likely to be for ever-faster delivery and will mean investing in order management and related systems that enable shipping from store in as little as an hour.

Prepare for automation to develop quickly in coming years. Grocer Ocado, a Top100 retailer in IRUK Top500 research, has put robots to work in its automated Andover warehouse that, it told InternetRetailing this year, have shortened order pick times from a couple of hours to 5-10 minutes. It is also involved in research to develop a SecondHands warehouse assistant. Elite IRUK Top500 retailer Amazon is already using robots to take shelving to the employees who are picking products, reducing the time taken both to stow items for sale and to pick them for

new orders. These examples were developed in-house but as they prove their worth, expect suppliers to market their own offerings that will then be available for a lower rate of investment. All of these solutions promise to improve the customer experience and customers will no doubt demand continuous improvement in that experience.

### In summary

Retailers and brands are competing as shoppers spend less cash in challenging economic times, while Brexit is likely to mean broad changes to the way things happen. This adds up to complexity and a need to control costs that is best served through efficient, well-organised operations. By investing strategically, retailers can compete when and where it most matters.

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PACKAGING MATERIALS • PACKAGING MACHINERY • PACKAGING SOLUTIONS • PACKAGING SERVICES

# Getting a load of the unboxing phenomenon this Christmas

WITH THE CHRISTMAS retail season nearly upon us, retailers are all getting ready to take their purchasing power up a notch. While great products and customer service remain top priority, the choice of packaging could add that all-important 'wow' factor for those looking to stand out from the busy Christmas crowd.

High street retailers have always fought tooth and nail to provide the ultimate in-store Christmas shopping experience. From custom-made Christmas trees to bespoke window displays, bricks-and-mortar stores invest time and money to get footfall through the door. But as sales continue to shift online, retailers are now turning their attention to the online experience. The channel may be different but the goal is the same – to create a memorable shopping experience that makes customers want to come back.

Packaging can play a role in this since in the absence of an actual store, it's the first point of tangible contact for the online customer. Get it right and it can create a brand experience at home. Get it wrong and it can tarnish your brand completely.

## Unboxing uncovered

To understand the importance of packaging, just look at the explosion of online unboxing videos, now estimated to receive 10bn views each month. What began with children making YouTube videos of toys being unpacked has now become big business, with high-end retailers such as Chanel and Hermes piggybacking on the phenomenon to raise brand awareness.

In terms of best practice, look at Birchbox, an online subscription service that offers samples of cosmetics and beauty products in packaging that's completely revamped monthly. From the layout and materials through to the internal décor, new packaging brings a fresh theme to life every few weeks. This feeds an excited and engaged audience so well that there are almost a quarter of a million YouTube unboxing videos dedicated to Birchbox alone! Clearly, with the right choice of packaging, a retailer can not only enhance their brand experience but even become an overnight internet sensation with a global reach.

## Back to basics

Of course, retailers first need to get the basics of packaging right. They must ensure their packaging is easy to open, use, dispose of or return, since all consumers are only ever a single click away from sharing a poor packaging experience online. Next up, the ultimate unboxing experience starts with the box itself. Firms should consider digital print, particularly when using corrugated boxes, as it allows full colour designs. Dollar Shave Club, for example, is a US subscription service that delivers its grooming products in boxes bearing quirky messages that not only reinforce brand identity but also engage with its young male market.

## Injecting the 'wow' factor

Creating 'wow' factor packaging can also be achieved with subtle additions that can make all the difference without breaking the

bank. These include using custom printed tape, personalised greaseproof paper or coloured tissue paper to add an extra level of mystery. For example, the Antalis Geami WrapPak® now includes coloured tissue paper with a unique 3D honeycomb structure. The result is not only an unparalleled level of protection and an environmentally friendly option, but also a beautifully presented, luxurious wrap for products.

## Packaging with a conscience

Earlier this year, a Unilever survey found that more than one in five (21%) of people would actively choose brands that made their sustainability credentials clearer on their packaging. A good example of leveraging this trend is clothing giant Zara, which packages online deliveries in recyclable materials. Smartly designed yet firmly sustainable, Zara's packaging promotes its green credentials in an appealing way that is edgy and cool.

Retailers must also rationalise their packaging to include the right range of products and box sizes to prevent overuse. A number of online retailers have repeatedly come under fire for using huge packages to deliver small items, yet an automated box sizing machine, like the one employed by Antalis, can help eliminate the need for void-fill altogether.

## Packaging as a souvenir

In the cut-throat world of online Christmas retail sales, it's easy for companies to focus solely on price, yet a better strategy is to view packaging as potential souvenirs. Snack box subscription firm Graze, for example, encourages customers to refashion its snack boxes as plant pots. Persuading customer to repurpose in this way means the brand stays at the front of their minds.

For online retailers, packaging started out as a necessity for protecting the product, so usually involved choosing the cheapest option available that got the job done. As ecommerce evolves and consumer habits shift, it's vital that retailers now create a customer experience that extends beyond the product itself by choosing packaging that reflects the brand.





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Ampersand is an award-winning agency that helps retailers create better ecommerce experiences. Ampersand architects lasting multichannel retail systems and builds ecommerce websites that drive sales across channels. Ampersand values customer collaboration and works with high-growth retailers to help increase conversion and drive efficiency through the strategic use of technology. Through agile delivery and accelerated builds, Ampersand can deliver flexible ecommerce systems quickly at a fixed fee. Ampersand's primary ecommerce technology suite includes Magento (ecommerce platform), Fredhopper (merchandising), Akeneo (PIM) and snow.io (IPaaS).

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**Hillarys (Web Blinds)**  
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We help you get your products to your customers on time and in perfect condition, creating an excellent customer experience with packaging solutions that also deliver the 'wow' factor. Our experts work with you to understand your requirements and develop a solution that is right for your business. Solutions cover a wide range of lead brands and the latest innovations in corrugate boxes, tape, cushioning and void-fill, mailing bags, papers, strapping, stretch films and packaging machinery. Whatever your packaging requirement, Antalis will find the best solution to your current and future needs.

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Duo UK has been manufacturing, engineering, procuring and distributing packaging for clients the world over since 1988. Whether it's saving money or the planet, creating stronger products or partnerships or delivering expert advice, excellent results are a guarantee.

## Customers:

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**JD Williams**  
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EC Group is one of the UK's leading providers of specialist third-party logistics services, providing a range of fulfilment, warehousing, storage and distribution services. Operating from our 100k sq ft fulfilment centre 30mins from central London, we provide full-service support for a range of ecommerce operators. Our operations are fully managed to ensure maximum process efficiency and control of each and every project, from concept to completion, with all aspects of our services being fully and securely reportable using the latest online technology. For ongoing fulfilment and distribution contracts, EC Group offers reliable, flexible and innovative services backed up by world-class data management and process control.

## Partners:

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**Parcelforce**  
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**GRANBY**

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Granby are a private limited 3PL, fulfilment and customer experience company in Lancashire. We operate a fully integrated services portfolio including 3PL logistics and distribution, ecommerce fulfilment, contract packing, response handling, order processing, customer care, digital and data services. We operate from a 108,500 sq. ft. premises across four warehouses and a multichannel 40-seat on-site communications centre, which allows us to provide fully rounded fulfilment and customer experience solutions. Granby are proud to have long-standing relationships with some of the UK's leading brands. We are the ideal partner to help you deliver all your ecommerce objectives.

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**LOGISTEX**

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Logistex provide automated materials handling and software (WMS) solutions for warehousing operations. We are specialists in storage and retrieval, order forwarding, picking and sortation systems. As an independent company with no manufacturing ties, we integrate products from across the industry without compromise. Logistex's LWS Reflex Warehouse Management System is a flexible, scalable solution for all warehouse operations from simple manual to complex automation. It is licensed by site with unlimited users, so there's no financial penalty for growth.

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**Wiggle**  
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**Maginus**

Whether you're a retailer, wholesale distributor, online pureplay or mail-order company, Maginus' core solutions are designed to meet your specific business needs. Maginus aims to take the stress and uncertainty off our customers' shoulders through the provision of industry-specific solutions based on world-leading technology platforms. Maginus' solutions include in-store technology, merchandising and warehouse management systems for processing sales and fulfilling orders as well as some of the leading eCommerce solutions in the industry.

Maginus has unique experience in integrating these technologies, to provide a true omnichannel platform.

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Paraspar is a trusted ecommerce solutions provider. We provide market-leading on-site search, autocomplete, visual and self-learning merchandising automation with content integration.

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Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) provider Peoplevox knows warehousing inside and out. With over 100 clients in 24 countries, its class-leading warehouse management system (WMS) is one of the ecommerce industry's most trusted and reliable tools. Peoplevox gives pureplay and multichannel retailers full control over their warehousing processes, decreasing costs, increasing profitability and improving customer satisfaction. Its software is purpose-designed to meet the unique demands of each business. Working on any Android-enabled device, the solution is flexible, fast and affordable. It's also truly scalable and easily integrated.

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PFS is a global commerce service provider of solutions including digital strategy consulting, digital agency and marketing services, technology development services, business process outsourcing services and a complete omnichannel technology ecosystem. The company seeks to optimise every customer experience and enhance the traditional and online business channels of clients across numerous industries. PFS is solution agnostic, with strong and longstanding partnerships with the major enterprise commerce platform providers, which results in the best technologies being utilised for each implementation. PFS has offices across three continents in North America, Europe and Asia.

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With more than 25 years of multichannel retail experience, Sanderson helps brands to navigate the complexities of today's retail and wholesale markets, sell across multiple sales channels, achieve a single view of customers and stock, and offer flexible fulfilment and delivery options. Our retail ERP software covers B2C/B2B channels, warehouse management & fulfilment, delivery integration and returns, purchasing, marketplace order management, ecommerce, EPoS, and digital store solutions.

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Snapfulfil is a best-of-breed, real-time warehouse management system which drives highly efficient warehouse operations, allowing customers to do more with the same or less resources. Thanks to its unique blend of Tier 1 functionality, proven delivery methodology and enterprise-class IT infrastructure, more and more retailers are turning to Snapfulfil to optimise inventory, space and labour within their warehouses – from ecommerce start-ups to multinational corporations. Offering a range of deployment methods and payment options, including its unique, No Capex model, whatever your warehousing challenge, Snapfulfil offers a solution.

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## SORTED



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Sorted creates game-changing software that sits in online checkouts, warehouses, retailer supply chains and on your smartphone. This changes the delivery experience for everyone who touches it – the customer, the carrier, the channel partner and the retailer. Sorted products include a scalable delivery management system, an ecommerce checkout personalisation plugin, a consumer delivery and returns app and a parcel price comparison website. Sorted is transforming the world of deliveries from a complex battle of logistics into a simple, seamless – and even uplifting – experience.

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## VAIMO UK



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Vaimo is the global leader in delivering award-winning digital storefronts, omnichannel solutions and mobile apps. Our focus is to accelerate B2B and B2C sales for our manufacturing, brand, and retail clients. As the leading Magento Global Elite Partner, our international team are the most knowledgeable experts in Magento omnichannel and commerce. With 15 global offices across EMEA and Africa and over 350 employees, we provide an international presence that allows us cultivate close, long-term relationships with our global clients.

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Pentagon is a market-leading service and technology provider that enables retailers to accelerate their online growth through international marketplaces worldwide. Using a team of more than 150 ecommerce experts, we optimise and localise data, integrate to new ecommerce platforms, connect stock management and order managements systems to marketplaces, launch and manage online stores, drive ecommerce sales, handle international logistics and returns, and provide multilingual customer service. Our tiered service offering provides retailers with a tailored solution to meet their unique requirements, from a robust technical integration to fully managed online stores across multiple international platforms.

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## David Smith

Sales Director, Antalis Packaging



### What does Antalis Packaging offer? What is your USP?

For us, it's far more than just providing an extensive packaging product range backed by a great delivery service. It's about providing the expertise and consultancy behind the specification to ensure that our customers get the best out of their packaging.

That's why, this year, as part of our company-wide 'Challenge Antalis' initiative, we launched our free Smart Audit for all new and existing customers, whereby one of our packaging experts will visit their premises and make recommendations for improvements.

During each audit, our team will review existing operations and identify areas where new products and solutions can increase efficiencies, speed up processes and deliver significant cost savings, all while maintaining maximum product protection. This could be something as simple as switching to a self-erecting box to speed up packing times, through to the introduction of automated systems to optimise the entire process.

Smart Audit has already made a big impact on customers, with one of them reducing the cost to pack items by a massive 70% and another able to downsize their warehouse by as much as 30%. We are looking forward to completing far more audits in 2018.

### Do you have specific solutions for internet retailers?

With consumer online purchases in the UK expected to grow by 70% by 2020, our goal is to help our internet retail customers with protective packaging appropriate to their products – minimise the packaging required while maximising the protection. For instance, in addition

## ANTALIS IN BRIEF

**Company name:** Antalis

**Global reach:** serving almost 130,000 customers in 43 countries

**UK Launch date:** Antalis has been selling protective packaging since the mid-1980s

**Turnover:** in 2016, the Antalis Group reported sales of €2.5bn

**Customers:** approaching 130,000

**Number of employees:** 5,600

**Partners:** Sealed Air, FP International, Ranpak, Lantech, Brother, 3M, Emba Protec – and more

**Contact details:** [www.antalispackagingsolutions.co.uk](http://www.antalispackagingsolutions.co.uk) or call one of Antalis Packaging's experts on 0370 241 1466

to a wide range of standard packaging products available for next day delivery, we offer many 'in-the-box' packaging solutions and systems to 'right size' each box.

But it's not just about practicality. We also offer a range of innovations designed to inject that all-important 'wow' factor for those looking to really stand out. This includes bespoke printed tape and personalised printed or coloured greaseproof paper, through to custom-printed sleeves. In this way businesses can use their packaging to create a memorable brand experience at the point of customer contact.

### How do you evaluate a client's packaging operations?

Every situation and customer visit is different, so how long the process takes is very much determined by what the customer wants from us. If our client want us to review their operations, we'll take all the time we need to understand every aspect of their packaging process, from product and order data, size of cartons and product selection, through to efficiency, environmental requirements and package integrity. We also get our packaging technologist involved to help address

pain points, test new or bespoke products, identify suitable solutions and provide comprehensive feedback.

If a simple, tried and tested solution is required, this can take as little as a few days. Where a complete solution is needed that requires new bespoke designs, prototypes, testing and production, this can us take up to several weeks.

### How can you help customers to reduce their carbon footprint while protecting their products?

We are dedicated to finding solutions that help our customers address their environmental responsibility while at the same time maintaining maximum product protection.

It may sound obvious but one of first actions when working with a customer who's looking to reduce their carbon footprint will be to gauge whether they are using the right range of products and box sizes to prevent overuse.

An automated box-sizing machine, for example, can help here by eliminating the need for void-fill all together. The solution measures the void in a box, then creases and folds the edges down to fit the contents snugly. This means the customer no longer needs void-fill and can even choose to move to single-unit packaging. We also

recommend that customers use similar materials that can be recycled together, such as paper or corrugate, in order to make it easier to store and recycle.

In addition, we've introduced our Green Star System to help consumers select the most environmentally friendly products from our range, which includes products that are made from recycled materials and that are themselves recyclable.

#### What kind of ecommerce solutions do you provide?

All of our packaging materials are available through a transactional website, where B2B customers can place orders online and review purchases. We have also implemented an integrated solution for some of our customers that connects their back-office system to our system.

For more information on the free Smart Audit service, please visit [www.antalispackagingsolutions.co.uk](http://www.antalispackagingsolutions.co.uk)

*This Company Spotlight was produced by InternetRetailing and paid for by Antalis. Funding articles in this way allows us to explore topics and present relevant services and information that we believe our readers will find interesting and informative.*



## CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

### Major supermarket tunes into serious savings thanks to Antalis Packaging

Antalis Packaging recently worked with a leading British supermarket chain to develop an innovative packaging solution for TV returns, saving the retailer hundreds of thousands of pounds each year.

With a number of customers returning TVs to store with minor product issues within the warranty period, the retailer was faced with the challenge of managing an incredibly costly returns process. The onward process of sending faulty or damaged TVs to the returns centre, often without the televisions' original packaging, meant that while some TVs left the supermarket for the returns centre as a high value re-saleable item, they would arrive as completely non-sellable due to further damage incurred in transit.

Cue the arrival of Antalis Packaging and its expert team, who partnered with the supermarket to create a bespoke solution to protect each product in transit back to the returns centre.

In investigating the issue, the team quickly identified that the boxes being supplied for television returns had been the same for a number of years and were not up to date with today's big-screen requirements. This often resulted in four or five TVs being placed in one box, which frequently smashed or damaged one or all of the screens.

In response to this, the team selected four box sizes to fit the supermarket's range of TVs, within which the internal protection solution was a dense polyethylene foam product which can be used to make bespoke shapes to create end caps, protecting the product from any drops or other impact. As well as being able to cushion each TV, a removable foam piece was designed to fit the plug as, all too often, a loose, exposed plug in the box had resulted in a smashed screen. Once outer box sizes were correct and foam inner fittings deemed suitable, a trial was launched in one of the store's branches to great success.

The packaging solution was then rolled out nationally and has resulted in the business saving hundreds of thousands of pounds in damage limitation. Unsurprisingly, the project has led to other areas of opportunity within electronics, with the Antalis team now looking at microwaves.







## Tony Dobson

Managing Director, Snapfulfil



### What does your company do?

Snapfulfil is a best of breed, cloud-based warehouse management system (WMS) that drives highly efficient warehousing and fulfilment operations, helping our customers do more with the same or less resources.

### What are your USPs?

Firstly, we offer a No Capex model in which customers pay nothing until their agreed go-live date. Everything they need to get up and running with Snapfulfil is included in a single monthly subscription with no upfront costs. In many cases, this makes Snapfulfil self-funding, since the subscription is covered by the savings the system delivers. We also provide the ability for our customers to temporarily increase the number of licences and devices they use for as long as they need them and revert back to their original agreement when activity levels return to normal. This provides a highly cost-effective and flexible warehouse management solution to support their peak trading periods.

Secondly, our rules-based configuration and rapid implementation methodology means that we can implement Snapfulfil in around 45 days, when it takes most of our competitors anything from three months to three years. As a result, we are one of just 12 companies in the world to be included in the Gartner® Magic Quadrant for Warehouse Management Systems.

Finally, Snapfulfil is hosted on an enterprise-class IT infrastructure which offers unparalleled availability, capacity, security, compliance and disaster recovery. No other cloud warehouse management system offers its customers this level of performance and reliability as standard.

### What new functionality does your latest version give to retailers?

We have a highly sophisticated, feature rich WMS that gives retailers full Tier 1 functionality, including single and multi-order picking, dynamic replenishment, pack stations, multi-carrier integration, rate shopping and returns management. We're also rolling out an all-new, browser-agnostic HTML5 user interface, along with advanced management information tools to allow our

## SNAPFULFIL IN BRIEF

**Company name:** Snapfulfil

**Global reach:** the Americas, Europe, Hong Kong

**UK Launch date:** 1970

**Turnover:** £10m

**Customers:** 100+

**Number of employees:** 80

**Partners:** Cisco, Honeywell, iland, Metapack, NetDespatch, NetSuite, VMware, Zebra Technologies

**Contact details:** for more information about the company and what it does, go to [www.snapfulfil.com](http://www.snapfulfil.com) or see all contact channels at [www.snapfulfil.com/contact-us](http://www.snapfulfil.com/contact-us)

customers to fully leverage the data within the WMS. And we've recently achieved Built for NetSuite certification.

### When did the company start?

In the early 1970s, our owner, Hugh Stevens, saw the potential for technology to revolutionise warehousing and logistics. One of his first customers was Coca Cola, who still use a version of his original warehouse management system to drive their UK warehouse operations! Hugh was also one of the first to recognise the potential of cloud technology as a platform for a best in breed warehouse management system and architected Snapfulfil for the web in 2007.

### How would you describe your company's vision?

We want to become the go-to WMS provider for fast-growing ecommerce retailers. Our principal focus is to offer cost-effective and innovative solutions which enable them to offer similar levels of service to much bigger companies. As they grow with Snapfulfil, our customers are also taking us deeper into the large enterprise space and also into new geographies. This is something we're planning to exploit further.

### What is your market position and what gap are you filling in the UK?

Snapfulfil is a best of breed, Tier 1 WMS which can be implemented in a fraction of the time and cost of traditional warehouse management systems. This effectively levels the playing field, allowing smaller enterprise level retailers to compete.

### Who are your customers?

In the UK, we work with retailers including Bensons for Beds, Freestyle Xtreme, Harveys, Oak Furniture Land, Shop Direct Group, simplehuman, The Cotswold Company and Vision Direct. In the US, we work with a large number of super fast-growing multi-level marketing, subscription commerce and ecommerce retailers including ASEA, Dream Products, Jamberry Nails, MeUndies, Loot Crate, Winc and Younique.

### What do you see as challenges in the coming year and what are you doing to meet those challenges?

I think the big challenge is ecommerce scalability and ensuring that warehousing operations can keep pace with growth. Growth is a great problem to have but it's still a problem and many warehouses just don't have the processes or systems in place to allow them to scale, especially when it's only for short periods around sales promotions or a Christmas peak. With consumers continuing to demand everything faster and cheaper, delivering the required service levels while still making a profit requires a streamlined, scalable warehouse operation which, in turn, requires a professional warehouse management system like Snapfulfil.

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## CUSTOMER CASE STUDY

**The challenge:** Having grown by more than 100% in the last 12 months, action sports retailer Freestyle Xtreme found that the warehouse management module of its ERP system lacked both the functionality and flexibility it needed to manage its incredibly fast-moving and equally fast-growing fulfilment operation.

Freestyle Xtreme's Customer Experience Director, Ben Richardson, says, "Our needs had grown beyond what our old system could handle and the warehouse had become a 'black hole' for inventory, with little visibility of stock once it was received.

"Due to the lack of process, we also relied heavily on the experience of our people to know how to work around the limitations of the old system. It was taking a good couple of months for new people to get fully up-to-speed, creating a lot of room for errors."

The business therefore set out to find a best-of-breed WMS to provide a stable and scalable platform for continued growth, and in order to support its crucial peak trading periods.

**The solution:** Following a review of several WMS vendors, Freestyle Xtreme selected the Snapfulfil Cloud WMS due to its feature rich solution, No Capex business model and the immediate productivity improvements made possible by the system's automated task management functionality.

**The benefits:** Compared to the same time last year, the operation is now handling 108% more volume with only three additional people, working an eight, rather than a 12 hour shift. Freestyle Xtreme has also seen a substantial reduction in sending errors, from around 0.4% to 0.06%.

Due to near-perfect inventory accuracy, overselling has also been virtually eliminated, ensuring that the company's customers are never disappointed. In addition to accurately recording and verifying inbound goods at both receiving

and put-away, Snapfulfil also drives a rolling inventory count, allowing any discrepancies to be identified in a timely manner and inventory records adjusted to maintain the highest levels of stock accuracy and integrity. This has removed the need for a manual stock take, saving five people two weeks of work.

Ben Richardson says, "We're picking and packing much more quickly since implementing Snapfulfil and despatching the majority of orders the same day.

"Snapfulfil has all but removed human error from the operation and gives us complete visibility of every action. As a result, if we do experience a problem, we're able to identify the exact cause and to modify our processes accordingly, driving continuous improvement."

**The future:** In order to accommodate its continued strong growth, Freestyle Xtreme is embarking on a project to introduce a multi-level pick process within the warehouse, increasing the height of the racking from 2.4 to 5 metres and effectively trebling capacity within the same footprint.

Snapfulfil will drive the put-away of products in the optimal location based primarily on velocity, with faster-moving product being located in the most accessible locations. The dynamic replenishment functionality within the system will also ensure that picking locations are automatically topped up, triggering a replenishment task when a location reaches an agreed minimum level.

Ben Richardson says, "Snapfulfil has taken us to the next level of efficiency, helping us to push more volume through the existing warehouse. Even so, we're rapidly reaching the limits of what is possible within the current set-up.

"We looked at moving but local property prices are astronomical. Thanks to the new racking and associated process changes driven by Snapfulfil, we estimate we'll get another three years out of the current warehouse, saving us all the cost and disruption of a move."