



Argos look to Keymas to develop warehousing systems

Control & Automation Systems

Phenomenal growth through their retail store expansion programme and increasing Internet orders meant that Argos, part of leading UK home and general merchandise Home Retail Group, needed to review regional operations in their goods supply chain. They looked to materials handling and logistics specialists Keymas for a solution.



In 1989, Argos installed and commissioned a completely new warehouse in which Keymas played a major role, putting together not only the basic concept and overall layout for the warehouse in Bridgwater, Somerset, but also the specific detail that was required to allow the automated conveyor system to operate. The whole system was conceived and designed with Argos to be more efficient and produce better productivity than conventional warehousing at that time and was installed within a twelve month window.

This warehousing system consisted of conventional racking and racking which allowed semi-automated cranes to place and retrieve bulk pallet loads from storage. Selected pallets would be transported on the automatic conveyor system to be located in a sub-system, where semi-automated cranes off-loaded pallets into pick locations for operators to order pick individual items for despatch to various stores in the region. Over the years, Keymas undertook several

modifications to enhance the system and provided full support in terms of maintenance and service.

New warehouse system to meet Argos growth

Due to the growth and success of Argos the business required a development of their Bridgwater warehouse operation; one of a network of nine distribution centres Argos currently utilises across the UK. The Bridgwater regional distribution centre (RDC) is essential to the operation of the business, supporting regional deliveries to 89 Argos stores in the South, South West of England and Wales. At the time, work was required to increase its throughput capacity in order to support the Distribution network.

The excellent working relationship built over 17 years between Argos and Keymas meant Argos felt confident in approaching Keymas with a view of establishing some initial cost parameters.

After careful deliberation, Keymas recommended and Argos agreed that a more conventional warehouse arrangement provided the most cost effective and flexible warehousing solution to meet both their current and future needs. This proposal utilised conventional racking and forklift trucks for handling of pallets.

As 89 of the 700-plus UK Argos stores rely on the Bridgwater RDC to receive customer orders, it was not possible to close down the premises in order to facilitate the changes without disrupting its constant flow of operation. Keymas was charged with the task of dramatically changing the warehouse operation – from a crane driven storage system to a manually operated truck storage system – turning the flow through 900 whilst maintaining functionality of the existing warehouse and installing the new facilities.



Argos awarded Keymas the contract

With the help of several partners, Keymas put forward a proposal which included the removal of existing equipment and staggered de-commissioning of cranes to enable the existing facility to continue to operate, whilst the new system was installed. The project also included for the de-commissioning of a multi-level pick mezzanine floor area, which consisted of four individual levels and had to be dismantled in stages.



Argos agreed to the proposed time schedules and budget costs and awarded Keymas the project contract.

Keymas chose their partners carefully, using existing engineering suppliers and their sister company Raxel - specialist in storage and racking solutions. As part of the project management task, Keymas had to also oversee the installation of a sprinkler system and complete new lighting facilities.

To aid this operation, Argos reduced the amount of product movement through the existing warehouse to complement the phased installation requirements of the new build. Keymas and partners worked closely together with the customer's project management team to ensure men and materials were fully co-ordinated onsite. Regular site meetings monitored progress, reviewed health & safety issues, CDM and compliance with design regulations.

The project was to provide a complete new warehouse package which would facilitate and support the customer moving forward and contribute to a functional storage and logistics system that would be flexible, operate more effectively and efficiently within the distribution arm of Argos.

Keymas Managing Director, John Barton reported, "The project was obviously very challenging at times, but through the close working partnership of all those involved, this was completed with minimal disruption to Argos operations, within budget and well within the allocated time frame".