



In recent years, the Finnish brewing industry has seen a lot of changes, which have had an impact on the production and distribution of beer and soft drinks. The MultiPick system supplied by Cimcorp has helped Olvi, one of Finland's leading brewers, to adapt to these changes in exemplary fashion.



The packaging revolution that has shaken the Finnish brewing industry started three years ago, when the environmental tax on drink cans was halved. The recyclable can, which gained a more environment-friendly image at the same time, began to be an even more attractive option in the eyes of the consumer.

"When the environmental tax was removed completely at the beginning of the current year, beer can sales overtook sales of bottled beer within a few months," explains **Hannu Fränti**, warehouse manager at Olvi.

Changes are coming for plastic bottles, too. Before, mineral water and other soft drinks were bottled in returnable plastic bottles, which were washed at the drinks plant and then refilled. By the end of the year, a new type of bottle will be introduced, a recyclable plastic bottle recently exempted from the environmental tax.

The new-style plastic bottles will be used only once in the drinks industry.

"The bottles are inflated and filled on the drinks manufacturer's assembly line, delivered to stores or directly to the customer and then returned for recycling. The used bottles are crushed and then used as raw material for new bottles.

In addition to cans and the two types of plastic bottles, the drinks industry also has to deal with the traditional glass bottle. Changes are also promised on this front," forecasts Fränti.

"The fate of refillable glass bottles hangs in the balance. Non-returnable glass bottles are bound to become more widespread in Finland, too."

Logistics and evolution

The development of packaging forms has posed huge challenges to the entire Finnish brewing industry. In particular, considerable adaptability is asked of the logistics systems of the major brewers which have adopted automated order picking, because conversion from old packages to new ones will happen in practice on the fly. In other words, during the transition stage the systems will have to be able to handle both the obsolescent and the new packaging modes in parallel.

Olvi's distribution center in Iisalmi was automated in 2005. At that time, all products delivered in plastic beverage crates or on dollies moved into the MultiPick system supplied by Cimcorp, whereas cans were excluded from the first phase of automated order picking.

Adaptable MultiPick - the all-rounder in order picking



However, the strong growth in can sales was predicted both at Olvi and at Cimcorp. The contingency for automated order picking for cans was built into the system at the installation phase. So it was possible to implement the actual transition flexibly.

“Cimcorp has shown that even major changes can be made to the MultiPick system step by step, without disruptive breaks in operation. In practice this has meant for example that we have gotten all the new packaging into the automatic order picking system without delays.”

From crates to trays

The returnable plastic bottles that are being withdrawn from the market are still mostly dispatched from Olvi in plastic beverage crates. Soon they too will be used less and less, even though they will not become completely unnecessary. That is to say they will continue to be used for transporting single-use plastic bottles and cans as a raw material for the light beverage trays that have been developed.

The development of practical trays has been a joint project for the whole brewing industry. Development work began with trays

intended for bottles. The tray that has been seen in Finnish supermarket beverage sections for some time now is a standard solution for the whole industry, which covers all 0.5-liter, 1.5-liter and 2-liter sizes of Olvi bottles. In addition to these, Olvi has developed its own tray for products sold in 0.95-liter bottles.

Development of a tray suitable for cans turned out to be more complicated. The common tray model designed for the industry was eventually created in a product development project, involving the members of the Finnish Brewery Association Olvi, Hartwall and Sinebrychoff, the beverage tray manufacturer K. Hartwall Oy and Cimcorp. However, the end result did not suit Olvi as it was.

“We ended up developing a tray in cooperation with Cimcorp and K. Hartwall Oy. Now we have a special tray for cans that we are truly pleased with.”

All in all, Olvi uses five different beverage trays. The MultiPick order picking system covers trays for 0.5-liter, 0.95-liter and 1.5-liter recyclable plastic bottles as well as the can tray that can be stacked with beverage crates. The tray designed for two-liter recyclable plastic bottles is picked using the MultiPick Dolly system.

The compatibility of MultiPick and trays that require gentle handling has been clear from the start. Even though the gripping gap of the trays is only 25 mm, MultiPick’s gripping fingers take hold of them with a sure, practiced hold.

“There are no worries in that respect either,” states Fränti.

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