

A man wearing glasses and a brown jacket is standing in a warehouse, holding a handheld scanner. He is looking up at a large, complex robotic picking system. The system consists of a large white overhead structure with various mechanical components, including a circular turntable and a robotic arm. The warehouse floor is filled with stacks of white plastic bins, each labeled with a barcode and the number '3400'. The lighting is bright, and the overall scene depicts a modern automated picking environment.

"We need the HelpDesk support to deal with database, programming and some hardware problems but, generally, our operators are very satisfied with MultiPick"

Help is on call for Nortura

For Norwegian poultry meat and eggs supplier, Nortura Hærland AS, help with its logistics system is only a phone call away. Pick magazine asked **Audun Solbrekke**, System Administrator for Nortura's Distribution Center, about the advantages of having a HelpDesk agreement.

Tell us about your role at Nortura.

As DC System Administrator, I'm responsible for keeping the logistics system here at the Hærland site running smoothly. I've worked here since 1998, when this facility was owned by Prior Norge BA. The company merged with Gilde Norsk Kjøtt BA in 2006 to form Nortura BA.

What happens here at the Hærland site?

This DC is used to distribute mainly chicken and turkey products, as well as eggs, to the whole of Norway. Operating on two shifts from Monday to Friday, we handle some 200 chilled poultry lines and about 200 frozen poultry products, as well as eggs and whole chickens that come from other facilities. Back in 2002, Prior decided to centralize the distribution of its fresh meat products at one location – rather than the six smaller facilities that it operated – and Hærland was the natural choice, as most of the meat was produced here. Prior built a new DC – with Swisslog acting as main contractor – and automated the logistics at the site. The project included a MultiPick robotic picking solution, supplied by Cimcorp. I was a member of the project group responsible for managing this change from 2003.

What was the reaction of your staff to the automation?

There was a degree of scepticism at first, when the project was announced. The automation has reduced the number of staff required significantly – from 85 employees per shift to just 25, including administrative staff. Once they saw the capabilities of the system, however, staff were very impressed.

How does your HelpDesk agreement work?

We have a customer support agreement with Swisslog, covering the whole system, and Swisslog has a contract with Cimcorp to provide HelpDesk services to us for the robotic handling solution. We're able to get telephone support from Cimcorp from 06.00 to 23.00, local time. In the first instance of a problem that we cannot solve ourselves, we call Swisslog. We describe the problem and they then call Cimcorp's hotline number. Cimcorp's HelpDesk engineers then connect remotely to our server and call our operators to discuss the problem in more detail.

What kind of problems do you face with the logistics system?

We can solve most of the common prob-

lems ourselves. For difficulties involving the robots, we do require Cimcorp's help but, thankfully, we have few problems with the MultiPick system, so we don't need to call on Cimcorp very often. We need the HelpDesk support to deal with database, programming and some hardware problems but, generally, our operators are very satisfied with the MultiPick solution and find it to be one of the most stable systems in the DC.

When do you tend to experience problems with the logistics system?

There isn't really any particular time during the shift that we're more likely to experience a problem. We pick orders from 06.00 through to 23.00. Of course, the later in the day that a problem occurs, the closer we are to our HelpDesk cut-off time of 23.00. This may mean that we cannot resolve the problem until the next morning. Cimcorp does offer a 24/7 HelpDesk service, of course, but we've chosen to have a limited hours service, as we feel it meets our needs almost all of the time.

Have you ever had problems with the HelpDesk support?

The only problems we have had really concern language. With Nortura based in Norway and Cimcorp based in Finland, discussions about the problem to be solved take place in English. Some of our operators have problems with English and some of Cimcorp's HelpDesk staff are more fluent than others. However, this issue is improving all the time.

What are your plans for the future?

Cimcorp's support has certainly met our expectations, so we plan to continue with the HelpDesk service. Both Nortura and Cimcorp have some room for improvement, but we're definitely on the right track.