

UP with MultiPick!

When soft drinks started being bottled in the new recyclable plastic bottles, MultiPick order picking expanded from the traditional beverage crates to beverage trays. The change of system at Hartwall was carried out on a tight schedule, in order to get the drinks into the stores in summer at a normal pace.

At the beginning of the year, the soft drinks industry in Finland adopted new, recyclable plastic deposit bottles. The new bottles brought with them new packaging: instead of the traditional beverage crates, the majority of soft drinks now leave for the stores in trays.

All Finnish breweries already use only recyclable plastic bottles for beverages sold in half liters. For drinks in one-and-a-half liter bottles, Hartwall is using both recyclable plastic bottles and old bottles during the transitional stage. This means that there is an order picking requirement for both crates and trays.

At the Hartwall distribution center in

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Lahti, the MultiPick system now picks both smoothly. During the modification work started in spring, the robot grippers were changed and the software was updated to suit the new products.

“The software has been changed so that the new products can be palletized so that the automation systems are able to transport them. At the same time order picking customer-specificity was added, which facilitates the distributor delivering the drinks to the stores,” says **Veli-Matti Eerola**, Hartwall’s Customer Supply manager.

Changes made in stages

Hartwall has 12 order picking robots. The changes were made in two stages so that half of the robots were in use the whole time.

“The changeover was done first for only a part of the order picking and when that was operational, the change was copied for the other part. The later modification work was implemented more quickly, since the programs had already been tested.”

The changeover began in April. In May the first robots were already handling the new half-liter bottles. The scheduling pressure on the work was tough, because Hartwall’s product range of half-liter bottles is extensive and summer was very near. If the implementation had been delayed, many people would have been

without their favorite soft drinks and ciders.

“The essential prerequisite for surviving summer deliveries was that the new packages could be picked automatically by MultiPick robots. The changeover process went really well: Cimcorp even managed to get the modified system into operation a little faster than planned,” says Eerola gratefully.

According to Eerola, finding a suitable time to make the changes posed a challenge for the project.

“Operations never stop, so changes have to be made during normal operation and with as little disruption as possible. In this case all the available time possible was utilized: changes were also made on weekends and long hours were worked on weekdays.”

The final part of the updated system was brought into operation in early fall. Now one-and-a-half liter recyclable plastic bottles are also being order picked automatically. For the time being Hartwall uses manual order picking for cans. They could also be picked with MultiPick, if they were packed in beverage trays.

“There are plans regarding that, where we would adopt the use of trays for cans and thus extend utilization of automated order picking.”

More packaging variations

Earlier, soft drinks were bottled in returnable plastic bottles, which were washed at the beverage factory and then reused. Bottles are still returnable, but the new single-use bottles are used as raw material for new bottles.

In collaboration with stores, the Finnish brewery industry developed a beverage tray for the new bottles, taking into account the possibility for automated order picking at the design stage. Thus the compatibility of the tray and MultiPick was ensured right from the start.

For the Finnish consumer, in practice, the new packaging mostly means the disappearance of crates from the soft drinks shelves.

“You can’t buy products by the tray, but this change has brought about more variations in packaging. Soft drinks are now often sold in packs of four and six.”

Hartwall is still using the traditional beer crates. According to Eerola, there will be no changes there in the near future. As for soft drinks, there are more changes in the pipeline for MultiPick.

“It’s clear that the traditional crate for one-and-a-half liter bottles will also have to be changed relatively soon. The most demanding part of the changeover has already been done: both types of bottle that were meant for order picking in trays are now included in the order picking system. The rest is mostly fine tuning.”





MultiPick can adapt to the situation. Modifying the gripper and software makes it suitable for new products

