

Belgravium launch VRS, a new 'Voice Recognition System'

A fully operational 'Voice Recognition System' from Belgravium Ltd is now available for demonstration and implementation. The system has an operating platform based upon Voxware's VoiceXML, VoxBrowser™ software which enables real-time voice solutions for standard warehouse operations. The software is compatible with several of the mobile data capture terminals within the Belgravium range.

Belgravium's Voice Recognition System (VRS) has the ability to support increasing numbers of distribution operations within a range of industry sectors. Food Service, Grocery and Cold Storage industries, Retail and General Merchandising through to Healthcare and Pharmaceuticals can all benefit from the proven benefits of voice technology. Belgravium have enjoyed an early sales 'win' for the system, with the Jersey Co-Op group announcing roll-out within their Jersey and Guernsey distribution facilities.

The significant benefits of the Belgravium Voice Recognition System are fully realised when applied to a range of standard warehouse activities, including order picking, replenishment, goods received, stock checking, quality assurance, returns and shorts processing. Hands-free operation can result in productivity improvements of up to 20% and accuracy levels of 99%. Voice allows reductions in warehouse operational costs providing a

safer working environment, reduced training times, and lower turnover of staff. Costs of printers, paper and other materials associated with alternate methods of order selection are reduced or eliminated.

Key Software Features:

- Activity Based Streamlining: Voice has the ability to reach to conditions as they occur, directing and coordinating workers to accomplish tasks in the most effective way.
- Adaptive Voice Recognition: a continuous speech recognizer is impervious to high noise and automatically ignores workers conversations with colleagues.
- Continuous Speech Recogniser: workers can speak with natural pace and rhythm rather than pausing between words or characters.
- Language Blueprints: workers can quickly set up user profiles.
- Multi-Lingual: Supports the simultaneous use of multiple distinct languages.

Key Hardware Features (mobile computers):

Many of the voice recognition systems on today's market use a dedicated voice terminal which cannot be utilised for alternative applications. Belgravium have developed their voice system around the use of

standard Windows-based mobile computer terminals. These terminals are invariably of much lower cost than their 'dedicated' equivalent and have the advantage of being truly 'multi-modal'. The terminal's ability to be a standard barcode device for part of the day, and then instantly switch to Voice mode, ensures that it has the flexibility to help address the complex business demands which face most warehouse and distribution operations. Other key features include;

- Maximum Wireless Interoperability: Spread spectrum, GSM/GPRS, GPS and Bluetooth Radio options.
- Industry Standard Operating System : Windows CE.Net
- Touch Screen Display: A high contrast ¼ VGA touch screen display, ideal for use in direct sunlight.
- Internal Scanner Options: Bar code scanning and RFID tag reading.
- Optimum Power Management: 12 hour battery life with a maximum 2 hour charging time.

For further information please visit the Belgravium web-site: www.belgravium.com

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BELGRAVIUM

Yellow turns Green



when deciding which manufacturer has the most eco-friendly offering, says Bill Goodwin, sales director of Jungheinrich UK Ltd

At present, fossil fuels (i.e. oil, natural gas and coal) account for the overwhelming majority of the world's primary energy consumption but, with growing concern over the impact of greenhouse gasses on climate change and, following recent events, energy security issues now high on the political agenda, a move away from fossil fuel-generated energy seems inevitable.

Some forklift manufacturers are investigating the use of hydrogen in internal combustion engines. Hydrogen generates no CO₂ emissions in the combustion process but, because it is not a natural energy source, the generation of hydrogen from hydrocarbons or water requires significant energy input. The most common route to hydrogen production is steam reforming of natural gas to produce a 'syngas' mixture of carbon monoxide and hydrogen. The carbon monoxide is then combined with water to form CO₂ and more hydrogen. This process is commercially well established on a large scale in the chemical industry but clearly generates greenhouse gas emissions.

Hydrogen's critics also point out that hydrogen's low energy density, high volatility, diffusivity and wide flammability range means that its storage, transportation and distribution are problematic and expensive.

Jungheinrich's engineers are working on a wide variety of alternative power sources, one of which - methanol - is viewed as one of the better options for fuelling internal combustion engines.

A liquid alcohol fuel primarily produced from natural gas, methanol can use conventional storage, distribution and transport infrastructures with minimal modification, while engines running on methanol can achieve high thermal efficiencies and high performance levels.

In a recent report, the University of Southern California hailed the use of methanol as a way for the world to reduce and ultimately liberate itself from its dependence on fossil fuel reserves while mitigating the effects on the climate caused by the excessive generation of CO₂.

The technology required to run engines on methanol is not new – it has been used by the motor racing community in the US for some years - and

Jungheinrich has already produced and is currently testing a range of tow tractors that run on the fuel. Early results are extremely encouraging and a prototype methanol-powered forklift is not far away.

It is our belief that the methanol solution represents one of the best options and is particularly suited for use with small trucks such as low level order pickers and powered pallet trucks - which, of course, make up the bulk of fleets in the retail and logistics sectors.

In the transition away from fossil fuels, a wide variety of fuel options will evolve and the availability of various liquid and gaseous fuels with a variety of different physical and chemical properties will require a re-assessment of the way in which a fuel's environmental impact is measured.

For the environmentally conscious forklift manufacturer the energy requirements of the design, development, production, maintenance and disposal processes of the truck all have to be considered when designing a new model and for the specifier, these things also have to be taken into account when deciding which manufacturer has the most eco-friendly offering.

When it comes to a forklift's fuel source, an evaluation of the fuel exploration methods, production, transportation and distribution will become increasingly necessary in order to fully assess the full environmental impact of the truck. Which is why Jungheinrich believes with its significant advantages in terms of infrastructure costs, ease of distribution and storage, and high performance levels, methanol represents an interesting option.

www.jungheinrich.co.uk

About Jungheinrich UK Ltd:
Jungheinrich UK Ltd offers Pallet Trucks, Stackers, Counterbalance Trucks, Reach Trucks, Order Pickers, Very Narrow Aisle and Stacker Cranes in more than 600 truck variants. As well as this, Jungheinrich provide an extensive Aftersales Support Network, Rental and Financial Services, Racking Systems, Warehouse Planning and Automated Systems. The company is a division of the German-owned Jungheinrich Group, which has manufacturing facilities Worldwide.

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WAREHOUSE INDUSTRY NEWS

Sponsored by Proteus Software Ltd

WAREHOUSE CRUNCH

but the real 'crunch' is whether the items leave correctly and on time.

So what might cause a warehouse crunch? Remember in our terminology a warehouse crunch occurs when items are apparently there but not leaving correctly and on time. The first example is obvious; the correct stock is in the warehouse but cannot be found. We are searching for an item to pick but it is not where we expected it. It may have been put in the wrong location, or its location wrongly recorded. Alternatively, we may have thought we have the right items, but subsequently find that the items were booked in incorrectly. It could be that the correct items are in the correct place, but when we get there we find that there is not a much as we thought there was, due to earlier picking errors. We may find that stock we have reserved for one customer has inadvertently been sent out to someone else. The next scenario that may impede delivery is that we have stock of the correct item, but it is out of date. Stock may have been incorrectly rotated, or perhaps the items we have do not meet the specific shelf life requirements of our customer. Finally, it could be that we are simply unable to handle the required volume of work. Even though we have the right stock and it is in the right place, our productivity levels are not good enough to ship the stock out in the required timescale. All of these examples potentially create a



'warehouse crunch', where the right items do not leave at the correct time.

I have a book by Richard Koch entitled 'The 80/20 Principle' which has the strapline 'the secret of getting more out of less'. This may be what many of you are experiencing with your warehouses: a continuing demand to get more out of less. Inevitably in these difficult and uncertain times there will be an ongoing drive to process the required volumes through your warehouse with less staff, and less space. In these circumstances there are two things you could do. Firstly read the book, which will help you assess where your priorities should lie, and secondly consider how your warehouse processes could be made more efficient and effective. Improved systems have been shown to help alleviate some of the 'warehouse crunch' constraints highlighted earlier – those factors that impact the smooth flow of goods from your warehouse. An easy method for locating stock, minimising items in the wrong place, better processes for receipting and putaway, proper rotation, and improved efficiency and accuracy are all benefits that have been shown to result from the use of a fully featured warehouse system.

I know the immediate response to a 'credit crunch' is to stop spending, but in the case of improved systems that could be false economy. A new, or better system should cost justify itself, and you may well find that the additional cost is more than offset by the 'warehouse crunch' savings. At Proteus Software we have also introduced a number of initiatives that will allow you to spread the cost of the system across its lifespan, so that the timing of the costs is more closely aligned with the benefits. These options, including SaaS where the costs of the system are linked to the volume of transactions processed through the system, are welcome facilities to help reduce the initial costs.

A powerful system will help clear the blockages in your warehouse so as to allow the smooth flow of product in and out, and help ensure that your business beats the 'warehouse crunch'.

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WAREHOUSE SAFETY .CO.UK

It's finally here! The industry has been crying out for it for too long and at last the wait is over!!

After many years of providing the UK's highest quality floor marking systems and solutions to the Warehouse and Logistics industry, ASG Services accepted the challenge and have created a Warehouse Safety division, supplying everything under one roof, as well as project management and installation as you would expect from ASG.

The new arm is fittingly branded 'Warehouse Safety', providing a single point of purchase for warehouse safety products, and related services. It is a new avenue for the company and will be a great resource for the Warehouse and Logistics industry.

Products offered will include, of course floor marking and associated products, but also traffic barriers, guard rails, traffic calming products, mirrors, signs, labels, anti collapse meshing, rack protection and elevated walkways, to name just a few. Clearly WarehouseSafety.co.uk will be going a little further than others have, their focus is on the needs of warehouses, which means the customer receives the most appropriate and effective package every time, and not what the sales person wants to sell.



Warehouse Safety will not only sell the items but will provide a valuable host of services from site surveys & product recommendation reports, to health & safety audits, work place risk assessments, racking inspections, product evaluation services, project management, installation and a bespoke product design services.

www.WarehouseSafety.co.uk is the website to visit and browse, you can read about products, choose the best ones for you and even order them if required. The site will provide important and relevant information on the products, their intended use, suggestions on positioning, important considerations as well as a bank of relevant industry related knowledge to help focus the mind on safety and efficiencies.

Speaking about the Warehouse Safety division, Tony Greysty, Managing Director of ASG said, "We've taken countless requests to supply more than just floor marking products over the years which has been a major driver for us. In a market where efficiencies rule and time is precious, our clients will save time in searching for suppliers, holding sales meetings, approving suppliers and planning installations. We'll offer the entire package or just one component of it."

Products to appear on www.WarehouseSafety.co.uk are designed, selected and recommended in order to provide improved safety for the pedestrian in the warehouse. However, careful consideration when selecting items is strongly advised by Tony who said, "The aim is to help protect people from injury, but productivity must always remain high on the agenda, which is why our Site Survey team will be available to visit and recommend products to help with these critical decisions."

The company has received a great deal of support from all stakeholders in the industry and looks set to be a real asset. Tony confirmed this by saying, "Manufacturers and end users have made it clear, that the time saving for Health & Safety Managers, Facility Managers, Site Project Teams, etc, will be a great advantage, particularly in finding the 'right' product on the first attempt of looking."

To find out more visit, www.WarehouseSafety.co.uk or call ASG Services on 01925 710923.

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proteus puzzle win a bottle of champagne!

Sudoku for Fun

Fill in the blank squares with the numbers 1-9 so that every row, each column, and every 3x3 box contains all the numbers from 1-9 without duplicating any.

Once you have found all the numbers cut out the grid and send it along with your name and address details to:

Linda Rodway, Proteus Software Ltd, 1730 Solihull Parkway, Birmingham Business Park, Birmingham B37 7YD www.proteussoftware.com

Feeling insecure?

Poorly restrained loads have implications for operators beyond the clear health and safety issues they can cause, says Schmitz Cargobull UK Ltd's Product Manager, David Pressley

With objects that fall from trailers resulting in five deaths and 216 major injuries in the road freight industry during 2007, the need to ensure that loads within trailers are properly secured is all too obvious.

However poorly restrained loads have implications for operators beyond the clear health and safety issues they can cause. "An insecure load will not only damage people but the vehicle, the trailer and the product itself," says Schmitz Cargobull UK Ltd's Product Manager David Pressley. "Braking, accelerating and cornering can all cause loads to shift in any direction – including upwards. This can contribute to vehicle instability and, in extreme cases, can cause a lorry to roll over or the load to be shot out through the front bulkhead."

Multi-drop loads, which can open up spaces within the cargo area as the driver's daily routine progresses, can bring particular problems, as David Pressley explains. "The open spaces allow more movement of the load which can slam into the front bulkhead or, on a curtainsider, the side curtains. As anyone who has ever driven on a motorway and observed an odd lump or bump in the side of a curtainsider can testify, this is a common problem."

When it comes to transporting goods in a curtainsider trailer, the Department for Transport guidelines state that goods must be secured as though on a flatbed. "Curtains should not be relied upon to secure or restrain a load in any way," says David Pressley. He continues: "Like seat-belts, the load restraint equipment is only as strong as the structure it is attached to, so the load must be secured to the vehicle chassis and not to the weather protection system. The load should be hard up against the bulkhead. If there are gaps between the load and the bulkhead, use intermediate bulkheads, load bars or blocking to fill the gaps."

David Pressley stresses that rope hooks are not suitable for load restraint as roping and sheeting is not a practiced skill any more. Neither, he says, is suspension from the roof - either through a stationary attachment or a track system that allows the load to slide. "Roof suspension will not stop the load moving, which is the entire point of restraint," explains David. "It may be more useful for some loads than others, but essentially the chassis should be the start and finish point of all restraint. It is wrong to believe that you can safely restrain a load with a strap that is essentially fastened at only one end and allowed to slide forward or backwards, on or in a track with rollers to aid linear movement. While this does work with some cargos, it doesn't and can't work for all types." Roof deflection on unsupported roofs, (Pillarless models) caused by the action of fastening the side curtains actually loosens and removes the strain in the load straps suspended from the roof, so the load is loose before the journey begins.

While, ideally the front bulkhead of every curtainsider should be rated to 13.5 tonnes, and the side wall rated to 10.8 tonnes and the rear doors to 8.1 tonnes, Schmitz Cargobull recommends that, to minimize the chances of a mishap caused by a loose load, optional equipment should be chosen to meet the specific needs of each operation, such as loading laths and cross-beams, straps and winches from the chassis floor and side raves including built-up side-rave edges etc.

All Schmitz Cargobull curtainsiders come with a minimum 13 pairs of evenly spaced tie-down rings rated at 2.0 tonnes, which can be fastened from above or below with an overhanging load. But, the important thing is how they are used to achieve secure load best practice, as David Pressley explains: "By strapping or tying down to the chassis we ensure that the load is secured to the moving vehicle," he says. "Normal tether and strap angles should be observed to protect against the braking force loads trying to propel a pallet or loaded item forward in the direction of travel.

David Pressley believes one of the biggest causes

of loose or poorly secured loads is the theft or accidental loss of separate pieces of equipment – such as straps, beams and fastenings – that are often used to fix down loads. "Companies provide the correct straps, beams and fastenings, but are plagued by losses or theft. This leads to short cuts being taken by drivers and operators who are using their initiative to keep the job moving but in doing so generate a potential health and safety issue," he says.

Of course, it is relatively straightforward for operators to find safe methods of securing daily loads, but occasional jobs where goods of differing dimensions are being delivered can be more challenging. "There isn't a 'one size fits all' solution," says David Pressley. "However, flexible securing beams do make a difference. They allow part loads to be secured reliably and simply. A Curtainsider for instance can emulate a box van by fitting side rigging boards which are perforated and punched to take a large selection of cross braces, such as division beams and straps. Each of these items can have in-built storage facilities to retain the individual parts within the trailer when not in use or can be made semi captive to prevent accidental loss.

"Users require workable solutions that are simple for the truck operator to use during his working routine. It is important when selecting a load securing system that the operator 'buys in' to the procedure and training should be provided to ensure that drivers are familiar with how the system works. Any load securing system will become notably less effective if it has not been properly applied."

Schmitz Cargobull (UK) is a subsidiary company of the German-owned Schmitz Cargobull Group, the biggest and leading manufacturer and supplier of semi-trailers in Europe. Today the Group, with more than 5,000 employees and a turnover of approx. 2 billion Euros now produces more than 60,000 plus units a year at nine manufacturing plants in Germany, Spain, Lithuania and Great Britain. The UK factory is situated at Harelaw, County Durham and employs over 350 workers. Some 3000 plus refrigerated, dry freight and

curtain-sided semi-trailers are developed and produced at the UK site every year. A number of additional services complete the company profile: Cargobull Finance for leasing and lease purchasing; Schmitz Cargobull Parts & Services for vehicle servicing and spare parts; Cargobull Service Partners for repairs and maintenance; Cargobull Telematics for trailer telematics and Cargobull Trailer Store for used trailers. Schmitz Cargobull refrigerated units are constructed using the company's FERROPLAST® Thermo Technology modular steel-skinned panels to keep loads at the desired temperature.



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Utility Watch Services for Proteus Customers:

In business companies have two primary concerns: How to bring more revenue in and how to reduce the amount going out?

Many of you will receive phone calls from either suppliers or their resellers offering packages on utilities, all of whom guarantee savings, generally without knowing what you have in place at the moment. Some of these calls will genuinely save you money, though in the main the offers have hidden charges or terms which detract from the opportunity proposed.

We, as an independent, would like to give Proteus's readers the heads up on where these companies make their margins. Hopefully you will then be able to use this information to get the best deal.

There are three main products you may be interested in. These are Telecoms, Gas, and Electricity. The brief below gives you the hidden areas where margins are made on your business by suppliers.

The simplest piece of advice to keep your supplier's on their toes is, the day the service goes live, send the supplier termination of service at the contract end date. This will keep them on their toes and keep your options open.

Telecoms Questions to ask:

- Minimum call cost, how much is it? Is it negotiable? Does the minimum call cost differ for landline, mobile and international calls?
- Setup fee, how much is it? The same questions are applicable to ask as with the minimum call rate. For example if your call pence per minute rate is 5p per minute, and there is a set up charge of 2p the cost for a minute call will be 7p, not 5p as you would assume. The combination of

minimum call charge and set up fee will make a huge margin for Telco's and subsequently an increase in your bills without you being aware.

- Line rental discount. Many Telecom suppliers will offer you a discounted line rental. The discount they quote will be set against BT standard prices. However there is a likelihood that you may not be on the BT standard tariff, and the chances are that your line rental is already cheaper than the discounted amount they have quoted. Therefore it is imperative that you check carefully the actual price they are offering against your current line rental price.

- Capped rates, this is where the supplier offers you a fixed price for a lengthy call. Is this working for you? The average business call duration is 1.68 minutes. The call has to reach a duration of 2 or even 3 minutes generally before the capped rate takes effect and the financial benefits begin. If you have an average call duration of less than 2 minutes then chances are they are not going to be beneficial. Considering that calls for the first 2 minutes are charged at a higher rate then this will probably work out to be a very expensive option.

Contract term, what is the length of the contract? What termination notice is required? If a notice of contract termination is not sent by you to your supplier by the specific timescale as stated in the contract then the likelihood is that the contract will roll over for a further two or three year term.

- VOIP, have you costed out the system requirements and additional broadband costs? What value will you gain from the service? It is advisable that independent consultant's opinion is sort prior to any Capex commitment.

Electricity and Gas,

- What is the standing charge by electricity and gas suppliers to the business for the supply of these services?

- Contract term, again as for telecoms, check carefully how much notice of your intention to terminate the contract is required to avoid automatic rollover.

- Have you got the correct meter installed? Depending on the nature of your business there are a variety of meters and tariffs available. Check that you have the one most suited to your business operation and its operating hours.

- Payment. Is there a price differential for paying the account by direct debit? If the payment is on a monthly plan when is it reviewed?

- Is the price fixed or flexible?

- Will amount of usage affect the offered price?

- If you are on a half hourly supply, have you got the data from your current supplier to pass out to potential suppliers?

In today's business economy it is essential to make the best savings to operating costs as possible however time is also a precious commodity. How much time do you have to spend on getting the best value for your business from your current utility suppliers by comparing like for like quotations? Very often it is one of the tasks that you're aware needs to be undertaken to ensure value for money and cost savings that will impact the bottom line, but you just don't have the time or the man power to do it. Utility Watch offer a free service to businesses, we will check what you are paying now for all your utilities, your contract dates and what you

could expect to be charged, whether for a kilowatt hour or for a local call. It maybe that you are getting the best rates possible already but based on our experience we have found that we have been able to save a further 10% – 20%.

Contact us on 0800 652 5100 for your free evaluation and potential cost savings report or email Dee Cox on dee.cox@utilitywatch.co.uk

www.utilitywatch.co.uk



Mobile computing for the Retail logistics



MD Paul Westmoreland

Psion Teklogix new NEO is the company's next-generation lightweight, pocket-sized handheld computer and leads the company's product range further into the retail sector.

Paul Westmoreland, managing director at Psion Teklogix says: "Retailers have specific requirements for a PDA; they commonly seek mobile computers that combine rugged durability with ergonomics and include such features as an angled display for optimal viewing during data capture and a brilliant colour touch screen, which offers brightness and clarity for easier readability both indoors and outdoors."

NEO combines these characteristics into a device to capture and access information immediately. Bookkeeping is made easier by eliminating paperwork and costly data entry errors. At the front of store a PDA can be used to optimise stock replenishment and reduce stock outs, users can track inventory and the query a product database anywhere in the retail facility and retailers can serve customers more effectively and reduce queues. Furthermore the PDA allows for the collection of data and images for store inspections.

Paul Westmoreland adds: "Using the same type of mobile computer used in a retail store in other parts of the retail supply chain - for example, light duty warehousing activities such as inventory tracking, stocking, shipping and receiving -

Retail environments thrive on real-time data access not only for managing the flow of inventory in the back room but also for serving customers in the front. A well-designed mobile computing solution and wireless network can support a retail operation by unleashing staff to focus on delivering effective customer support.

offers a retailer benefits in terms of flexibility and support."

In addition to being suitable for use in retail stores, the NEO can be used as part of a real-time wireless data collection system to deliver both the "speed" and "accuracy" that are critical in a busy retail warehouse or distribution centre. "A PDA that can offer bar code scanning, RFID, image capture and speech-input capabilities enables a more effective supply chain operation by providing real-time order and inventory information at the user's fingertips, eliminating costly paperwork and data entry and reducing operating costs and data collection errors created by manual processes," says Paul Westmoreland.

NEO takes full advantage of Microsoft Windows® CE .NET 5.0 to integrate a number of advanced data capture and communications functions that increase worker productivity and connect users with their critical applications whether in the store, warehouse or remote job site. These functions include an integrated imager or laser scanner, and Wireless Local Area Network (WLAN), and Bluetooth® wireless capabilities. In addition, NEO leverages Psion Teklogix' PTX Connect™ application to deliver Voice over IP (VoIP) with

discrete Push-to-Talk for real-time voice communications as well as Instant and Text Messaging functions. NEO can be easily expanded to incorporate new technologies, such as Radio Frequency Identification (RFID), based on a user's future application requirements. These features combine with the unit's compact size and an 8 hour battery to make NEO ideally suited for a range of retail logistics applications.

About Psion Teklogix

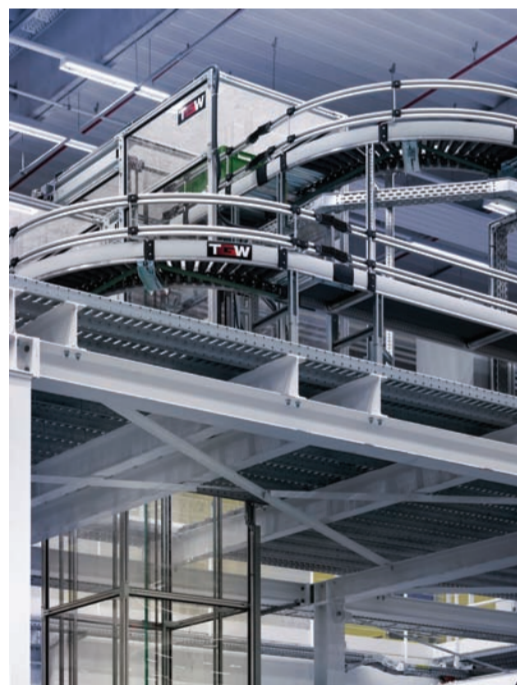
Psion Teklogix is a global provider of solutions for mobile computing and wireless data collection. The company's fully integrated mobile computing solutions include rugged hardware, secure wireless networks, robust software, professional services and exceptional support programmes. With over three decades of industry experience, Psion Teklogix has customers in more than 80 countries around the world, and over 36 sales and support offices in 17 countries.

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TGW Joins AMHSA



TGW Limited, the wholly owned subsidiary of Austria based automation company, TGW Logistics Group, has joined the UK Automated Materials Handling Systems Association (AMHSA).

Regarded as the voice of the UK automated handling industry, AMHSA has a comprehensive membership that includes the principle UK companies that supply over 80 per cent of all automated materials handling equipment purchased in the UK.

The Association is the industry platform for discussing issues of common interest amongst suppliers of conveyors and automated materials handling equipment in the UK and plays an active role in improving quality and safety standards for users – such as the drafting of CEN and ISO standards affecting the automated handling sector.

Philip Steeds, Sales Director for TGW Limited, says: "As a leading supplier of conveyors and automated handling systems to the UK and Ireland, it is wholly appropriate, and only right, that we should become a member of AMHSA. We look forward to becoming actively engaged in both the conveyor and the systems integrator groups."

Graham Watts, Secretary of AMHSA, comments: "The council are delighted that TGW Limited have joined AMHSA. TGW's input will further add to our discussions on matters of mutual interest and promote, through the combined strength of the membership, ever-improving standards of quality and safety for the benefit of the users of automated material handling systems."



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When the going gets tough.

It has been a tumultuous year for the industry, increasing competition, roller coaster fuel prices and now the credit crunch. The traditional reflex response to hard times is to batten down the hatches and stop spending, technological budgets often suffers. But should this be your response? Or would you just be making the situation worse?

Many of the companies in this sector have grown multiple in-house systems to cope with the rapid growth during the last ten years of "good times". The carbuncle of disconnected spreadsheets, databases and email trails, carry a multitude of unhealthy symptoms at this difficult time, a few being:

- A lack of visibility of business operations – With information spread across many different places, senior management do not have vital information at their fingertips to make decisions quickly.
- Individual employees become indispensable – The reliance on individual employees that create bespoke systems become disproportionate.
- Costly administration and errors – Double, triple and even quadruple entry is commonplace, expensive, prone to error.

Technologies that address these issues have matured; ERP, warehouse management systems, supply chain and compliance software are easier than ever to install and intuitive to operate.

In addition to this technological maturity, business rationale should drive logistics businesses towards re-evaluating outdated infrastructures. As it is an investment in technology now would be the most profitable time to do so and here's why:

- It's a buyers' market. Uncover the very best from IT suppliers, and seek out the most cost effective propositions.
- Technology is a platform for future proofing your business with a structure for change. To quote Darwin "It is not the strongest of the species that survives, nor the most intelligent that survives. It is the one that is the most adaptable to change." Surely this is also applicable to business? – Technology allows you to adapt to your environment.
- Make better decisions – based on a real time view of your company.
- Improve productivity – eliminate double entry, improve individual productivity, make systems easy and accessible.
- Increase market share by capitalising on weakened competitors – make it easier to do business with you, improve customer service, speed delivery, make fewer mistakes, and have all the information they need.

Yes it is the credit crunch and yes times are hard, but this is also a time of opportunity.

marketing in a box

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www.marketing-inabox.com.

Knock down rates



Comment from Roger Williams, chief executive officer of the United Kingdom Warehousing Association (UKWA)

The Empty Property Rate Rules came into effect on 1st April 2008 and changed the tax position of empty warehouses and other industrial and commercial property substantially. So, since April fool's day, empty warehouses have been liable (after a six month 'holiday') for empty property rates at the same rate as if they were occupied.

Sadly, the change to the rating rules was no April fool's joke – certainly no one in the third party logistics services sector is laughing.

UKWA estimates that on a typical empty 10,000 square metre warehouse, the potential rates bill could reach a quarter of a million pounds each year but Ministers have sought to justify this new tax on the grounds that the reforms will provide an incentive for owners to re-use, re-let or re-develop their empty properties. As a result, it is argued, the supply of commercial property available to new and existing businesses will increase, thereby helping to reduce rent levels which burden the competitiveness of the UK.

However, one doesn't have to be too cynical to view this as simply another tax raising move. Indeed, as far as HM Treasury is concerned, the changes will close a loophole that, it contends, currently costs the UK taxpayer some £1.3 billion in lost revenue.

Despite growing calls for it to reverse the changes, the Government remains entrenched in its position. Labour MP for Halifax, Linda Riordan, did receive the support of 35 MPs for the tabling of an early day motion to reintroduce empty property tax relief, but this EDM (like most of them), is unlikely to be debated.

Although it is now accepted that logistics plays a vital role in the UK economy and warehouses - often those operated by third party, or 3PL, providers – are at the heart of most efficient logistics strategies, in drafting the rate changes, the government has failed to understand that there is no logical reason why a 3PL warehouse keeper would keep a building deliberately empty. A 3PL will always seek to find a client to fill the site with pallets. However, if the market has moved against him, requiring him to pay rates is an additional hardship that, in the current climate, this industry could do without.

The extent to which companies will go to avoid paying the tax is brought sharply into focus by the actions of one of UKWA's member companies, East Coast Storage. To dodge the tax, the company has demolished an empty storage unit at its site in Kings Lynn.

Another UKWA member, The Potter Group, which operates some 1.6 million square feet of covered warehousing at five sites throughout the UK, also recently knocked down an empty warehouse to save on rates. Furthermore, the change in the rating system has forced The Potter Group to rethink plans to build a new store.

Having invested money and considerable management time and effort in obtaining planning permission at two of its sites for either new warehouses or warehouse extensions, the company has delayed a decision to commence building work thanks to the potential for incurring empty property rate tax.

The fact that this new legislation not only encourages the early demolition of older empty warehouse buildings but also discourages the construction of new speculative warehouses, means that when the market recovers there will be a shortage of available warehouse space and that will result in higher rents. It is, quite frankly, an absurd situation.

The United Kingdom Warehousing Association (UKWA) is the UK's only trade association dedicated to serving the warehousing and logistics sector. The association is keen to hear from any industrial property owners whose business has been affected by the new rating regulations. Roger Williams can be contacted by telephone on: 0207 836 5522 or by email RWilliams@ukwa.org.uk

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Editors' notes: About The United Kingdom Warehousing Association

With over 600 member companies, the United Kingdom Warehousing Association (UKWA) is the UK's only trade association dedicated to serving the vitally important warehousing and logistics sector. Established in 1944, the Association's members control nearly 100 million square feet of warehousing space from nearly 1300 locations across the UK. Although originally established as a trade body for the third party warehousing sector,

the Association now embraces all companies that operate a warehousing or distribution facility. Membership is not restricted to those companies based within the borders of the United Kingdom.

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