



All of the lights

SHD Editor James Burman visited the distribution centre of lighting specialist Christie Lites, to find out more about its ongoing sustainability efforts, and to see its recently completed shuttle system.

James Burman

Christie Lites is a stage lighting specialist, operating out of a distribution centre outside Coventry. Upon arrival, I was greeted by Robin Wain, Business Director for Christie Lites, who told me a little bit more about what the company does. He explained that the focus is providing stage lighting for concerts, the theatre, trade shows, as well as TV and film. While the pandemic has naturally reduced the quantity of events that require large-scale lighting installations, he assured me that the downtime in the warehouse had been spent wisely. Re-organisation, a continued focus on sustainability, and the installation of a new shuttle system, provided by multiple Logistics Awards winners, SEC Storage, were some of the highlights.

After a tour round the site, I had a few questions for Robin. Firstly, as he had mentioned environmental sustainability a few times, I was curious to know how much of a role it plays in Christie Lites' operation.

"It plays a huge part," Robin told me, "We've got a handful of solar panels on the roof here, we've got EV chargers out the front and they're free for use, and we stick to renewable energy tariffs. It all helps! The other thing is that we don't facilitate our own transport; there are plenty of great businesses out there that do transportation very effectively and efficiently. We don't need 10 trucks outside this centre, sitting idle for 75% of the time – it really would be inefficient."

It struck me that there were a large amount of 'flight cases' neatly organised around the warehouse, but that they all looked very similar, and I wondered if that too was linked to sustainability.

Robin said: "To a certain degree, yes! There are only four to half-a-dozen types of containers, and it's all bespoke designed around truck packing. We know exactly what envelope we're working with because of the streamlined, modular nature of the boxes. What we fit in one truck, others might fit into a truck and a half, and due to the nature of the industry we work in, where a lot of it is based around touring, that can really add up."

It was clear that a lot of thought had gone into the nature of the lighting containers used. They were durable and adaptable. Upon closer inspection and confirmation from Robin, all individual components of the boxes could be replaced if worn or damaged. When damaged, other equivalent designs might need to be completely disposed of, but with Christie Lites' cases, you just pop out the rivets and replace the part.

It wasn't long until we reached the reason for my visit: the multipoint, multi-directional shuttle system, designed and installed by SEC Storage. In its early stages, the system was the winner of the 2019 Innovation category at the Logistics Awards, so I had been keen to see it in person.

I asked Robin what the need for the system was: "Space! The sheer volume of stage trussing that we can fit in here is great. As you can see, there are multiple layers, and we haven't even reached full capacity yet. We considered a mezzanine, but when we looked at the number of operators required on each level and the time it took to move items between levels, it seemed like there might be a better way for us as a business, particularly as the nature of what we're moving and storing wasn't 'pallet shaped' – and this was it!"



Ground floor picking levels allow for rapid picking of fast-moving products, contributing towards a significant operational cost saving. The design made use of readily available componentry from blue-chip suppliers, so parts could be replaced easily.

The system increased a volumetric utilisation of 55.3% of the total cube (taking into account all tolerances and product spacings required). This is a 229% increase in volumetric capacity when compared with an adjustable pallet racking option. The company saw a 500% increase in the amount of pickable locations, ensuring that 100% of the SKUs had their own dedicated lane.

After a demonstration of the system in action, Robin concluded: "From a space-saving perspective, I would go as far to say as when we one day move sites, this system will go to twice the size. Flexibility is another important thing; the fitting is bespoke, so SEC will allow us to make the system longer or deeper, or both."

SEC Storage works with a wide range of customers across industry sectors including automotive, pharmaceutical, food & beverage, medical devices, cold storage, consumer goods, packaging, fashion and retail. The company says each customer is unique and it provides bespoke services to ensure all projects are tailored to requirements and deliver data-driven, intelligent warehouse solutions.

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