

How to pick more lines during the order-picking process

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If you want to get more productivity from an order-picking truck, don't drive faster – work smarter instead. Only by maximising the time you spend on the actual picking will output be increased. Both technical and organisational approaches can be taken to make a real difference.

Various tests and measurements carried out on order picking (by Dutch agency Andersom Testing, for instance) show that maximum driving speed has little influence on an order-picking truck's efficiency.

It doesn't matter whether the truck can do 11 or 14 km per hour if the distances covered are not very long. By long, we mean distances of more than 75 metres, without interruptions such as crossings, bends or other hindering elements such as forklifts or pedestrians which require you to slow down.

Make the most of time

The real gains come mainly from increasing the time you can devote specifically to picking products. That is best achieved by reducing the time you waste on other activities. As already mentioned, the advantage of higher driving speed is limited.

Good acceleration and deceleration (including automatic speed reduction) certainly have more impact. However, there are limits, as you will want to protect the goods and keep the pallets or roll containers on the forks. A steering system with precise behaviour and optimised steering angles can be beneficial, especially if you have to work in tight spaces or narrow aisles.

Most of all, your picking process will benefit from avoiding loss of work time to walking and to actions or movements that have nothing to do with the picking itself. Getting back onto the truck is a good example. Think of all the time it takes to mount the truck after a pick, to drive, to brake, to turn around and to get off again. This adds up to a substantial figure in the course of a full working day.

For this reason, smart order-picking trucks have a walk-along button on the side. Some call it a side steering mode. Instead of stepping onto the truck, you just press the button and the truck will drive beside you to the next location. Although this happens at a low speed, you can save a lot of time if your routings are well planned.

More picking, less energy consumption

The productivity gain from side steering mode can add up to between 10 and 20%, provided the locations are not far from each other. Studies show that with distances of anything up to 6 metres between picking locations this function will yield a direct profit. The closer the locations, the higher the return.

It makes sense to take this into account when allocating stock locations. These choices can also save a lot of energy. There are savings not only for the operator, who doesn't have to get on and off all the time, but also for the truck, as it moves more slowly and smoothly. Energy consumption can drop by between 10 and 13%.

If the location distances are more than 7 metres, then getting back onto the truck is the way to go. Extra time can be saved if it is equipped with 'flying start' functionality. If your truck also has spacious and easy access, obstruction-free entry and ergonomic steering controls, you will work even faster. With such repetitive work as order picking, putting all these advantages together will make a huge difference.

Source: Mitsubishi Forklift Trucks