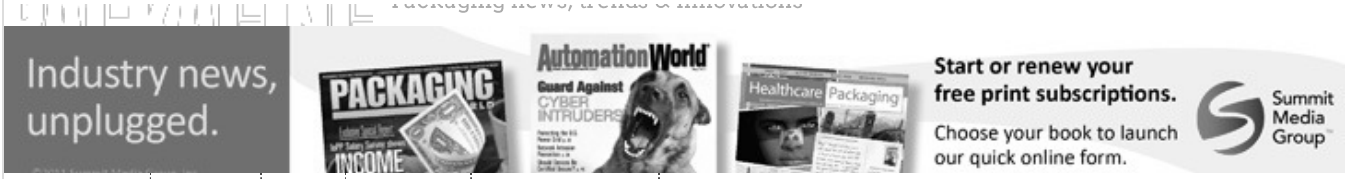

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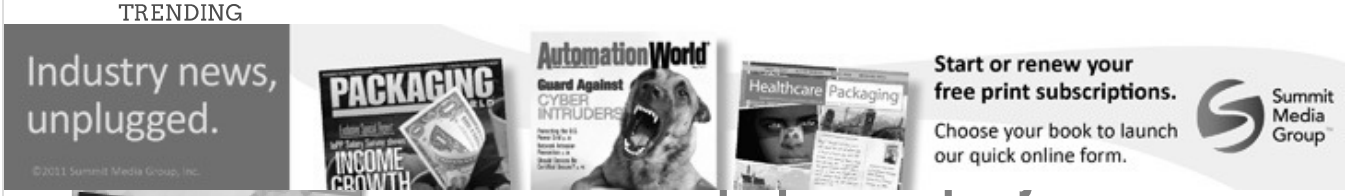

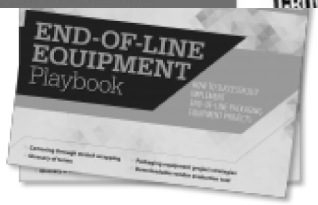

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What to look for when selecting palletizing equipment

Tips and trends to consider when choosing palletizing equipment.

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By Marty Weil, Contributing Editor

ENLARGE

1. Look for more hybrid solutions and simultaneous operations. The effort to reduce secondary packaging is accelerating, which is having a significant impact on the design of palletizing equipment. The trend is driving hybrid palletizing solutions involving both conventional and robotics technology. Simultaneous operations are also becoming more prevalent, such as palletizing and stretch wrapping in a single integrated piece of equipment. Increasing numbers of package applications are better suited to fully automated equipment; as a result, the need for package handling flexibility involving quick “tool-less” or

fully-automated technology continues to play a bigger role.

2. While the newest palletizing equipment is robotic, it is not always required. Sometimes a robot is not nearly the most cost-effective solution overall. If a plant is running a lot of pallets with similar products, consider staying conventional, as opposed to going robotic. Or at most see about a hybrid option, where a conventional system forms the layers and then uses a robot to place layers and build the pallet. For example, if you have two conventional layer formers, one robot can build two pallets. If you're moving more than 16 or 20 cases per minute, robotics may not be the best solution.

3. Don't forget about the importance of your safety systems in updating palletizing technology. Safety systems are having a huge impact on the design of equipment today, with an ever-increasing importance placed on the use of safety- rated devices such as PLCs, VFDs, and automatic air-dumps. Some palletizing equipment is pretty wide, and must be cordoned off. Adhere to all safety procedures. Establish strict protocols to make sure safety is not compromised.

4. Consumer-level developments and graphics technology may affect your machine purchasing decisions. Warehouse stores are driving more display-type pallet loads and cases. In turn, this drives the need for graphics-out palletizing, often requiring the placement of tier sheets between layers and corner boards to improve load integrity and warehouse stackability.

5. The growing use of shrink film impacts palletizing flexibility. Shrink-wrapping often requires different handling methods within the machinery, compared to that of corrugated cases or paperboard packages. In addition, both very small and large pack sizes create the need for greater flexibility. This explosion in SKUs has resulted in frequent production line changeovers and further highlights the importance of versatility.

6. As the costs of complex equipment rise, careful budgeting is even more important. Newer, lighter-weight packages with little or no secondary materials combined with the need for greater flexibility and automated changeover are driving up the cost and complexity of palletizing equipment. It is also resulting in an accelerated use of robotics technology. Be sure to consider all bottom-line costs before purchasing equipment; assess if the investment proves its worth in empowering you to handle higher quantity outputs and lower per-pack weights.

7. Make sure to look at machine builder risk assessments. Machine builder risk assessments are supposed to be available to end users; but, palletizing equipment purchasers are not necessarily aware of them. Ask the machine builder for the risk assessment, or at the very least, the information that the machine builders must disclose to OSHA.

8. Consider slip sheets for pallet stability. With new technologies, it becomes very complex to add slip sheets or tier sheets later. Think about how you supply slips or tiers to a palletizer; if those sheets aren't straight, a robot may not know that, and the placement might be incorrect.

9. Machine controls should meet site norms and existing controls standards. Keep your controls constant and up to standards on all equipment. With the increase in globalized manufacturing, you often need to meet international standards and you should always have independent testing done to make sure your potential

palletizing equipment is in compliance. What works in the factory environment is also important; each factory must meet its own needs, but be in compliance with all standards to ensure compatibility and safety.

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