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Intermarché acquires over 250,000 Craemer Plastic Pallets

With over 250,000 plastic pallets rolled out across 35 logistics centres that supply the brands stores, Intermarché has left the rented pallet behind in favour of setting up its own plastic pallet pool - a first in France for a mass-market retailing brand.

The new Craemer plastic pallet pool, deployed by ITM Logistique Alimentaire International/International Food Logistics (ITM LAI), is part of a policy to optimise logistics costs and the increasing automation of the brand's warehouses. "Improving productivity, guaranteeing quality and product traceability, delivering everywhere better and cheaper is the logistics culture of the company", confides Samuel Bidolet, Logistics Operations Director at ITM LAI. "Oriented towards the customer and service at retail outlets, we are constantly looking for new solutions to improve our logistics performance and guarantee the best service at the lowest cost to our retail outlets. Being equipped with our own plastic pallet pool follows both an economic model and our desire to increasingly automate our warehouses."

Craemer pallet performance

The French brand chose the Craemer pallet, as it turned out to be the most successful during testing. The Intermarché logistics team effectively carried out tests with pallets from six different manufacturers on four of their platforms over a period of almost two years. Three criteria were measured: the loss rate, the return rate and the damage rate. The latter was decisive in their choice. The Craemer pallet turned out to be extremely solid - contrary to the others - with a damage rate of only 1 per 1000, often caused by handling errors. Due to the one-piece injection moulding manufacturing process, Craemer pallets are much stronger than assembled pallets.



Order preparation at one of Intermarchés warehouse operations.

Thus, ITM LAI acquired 60,000 plastic half pallets (model CR2, 800 x 600 mm) and 200,000 plastic Euro pallets (model D1 ECO, 1200 x 800 mm) from Craemer. The pallets are lightweight but robust and able to withstand significant temperature variations.



Craemer pallets are positioned on metal collars before being routed through the aisles for order picking.

"We accompanied ITM LAI throughout the project in order to evaluate their specific needs and to provide the logistics team with a pallet in line with their activity", explains Jean-Luc Leroux, Sales Manager at Craemer France. The D1 ECO pallets were additionally reinforced with three steel bars enabling them to bear 5000 kg of static load, 1250 kg of dynamic load and 1000 kg on racks. 14 non-slip plugs were also added to increase load safety. "We also answered to specific demands which allowed us to develop our pallet. Effectively, all those concerned by pallet management, from the warehouses to the retail outlets, were involved in the tests and the choice of the future pallet. So, at their request, we made some improvements such as the addition of the 7mm edges assuring stacking safety and the small notches for the preservation of plastic film", continues Jean-Luc Leroux.

These pallets are reserved for downstream logistics and move in a closed circuit between distribution platforms and the company's retail outlets in a system where follow-up and traceability are

guaranteed. Each pallet has two bar codes. “We have to manage pallet flow to ensure that they return to the base”, explains Benoît Dubuisson, Logistics Director for the Intermarché Northern region. “The pallets are registered in the stores and return to the circuit, carrying out approximately one rotation per week. We therefore record about fifty rotations per year and per pallet, which is completely in accordance with our objective of return on investment in 2.5 years. The unit cost of the plastic pallet is certainly higher than that of a wooden pallet, but it demonstrates its profitability through its lifecycle.”



Once picking is completed, the orders are delivered to the stores.

Reduction of RSI and occupational accidents

Beyond economic reasons, ITM LAI chose to replace wood with plastic in order to have a safer, lighter and more practical medium for the staff who handle pallets daily. In comparison to 22 or 23 kg for a wooden pallet, the plastic pallets are much lighter with a weight of only 14 kg. Their smooth surface facilitates handling operations with bare hands. With plastic pallets, the risk of hand splinters or injuries to the eyes is ruled out. “We are very satisfied to note a considerable drop in Repetitive Strain Injuries (RSI) and occupational accidents”, states Samuel Bidolet.

The success of this change is also due to the fact that the personnel responsible for handling operations in warehouses and stores are convinced of the legitimacy of this change as Alain Peire, Packaging Manager at the company’s operations in Vimy, confides. “It is clear that absolutely nothing could possibly convince us to return to the wooden pallet”. There are multiple advantages in favour of the plastic pallet: contrary to wooden handling supports, the plastic pallet is resistant to humidity - perfectly waterproof and rot-proof. Furthermore, it also has better resistance to falls and forklift impacts than wood. Its tare weight and dimensional stability make it an ideal load support medium for use with handling equipment such as conveyors, palletisers, sorters, and stackers.

Sustainable development

This operation is in line with the environmental undertakings of the Mousquetaires Group. “For several years now, Intermarché stores have been committed to a sustainable development in local environment policy. For example, in two years we reforested woodland in Aquitaine by planting 7.5 hectares. With the Craemer pallet, we have developed an economic model, which perfectly

matches our commitments. We decided to choose the D1 ECO Craemer pallet in regenerated HDPE from a perfectly identifiable source. This pallet is infinitely recyclable and once worn out over time, Craemer reclaims it to be recycled”, says Samuel Bidolet.

Bart Vandekerckhof, Managing Director of Craemer France, underlines: “Our pallets have a long life cycle and are much more durable than wooden or cardboard packaging. Furthermore, at the end of the life cycle, we recycle 100% of our pallets. The implementation of this pallet pool also allows the whole supply chain to be more ecological by optimising transport returns and truck filling.”

This solution was implemented in 2015. It is totally operational and runs at full capacity. With 50 rotations a year and a damage rate of 1 per 1000, the objective has been attained. The Craemer pallet has proven to be not only more economic, safer and more practical but also more ecological than the wooden pallet. “We are very pleased with our partnership with ITM LAI and also to participate in the implementation of the logistics of the future”, concludes Bart Vandekerckhof.

About ITM LAI (Logistique Alimentaire International/International Food Logistics)

ITM LAI, a food logistics subsidiary of the Mousquetaires Group, supplies and delivers to Intermarché and Netto brands, representing more than 2,800 retail outlets in France. LAI ITM has 8,000 employees across 36 logistic platforms, 8 regional transport centres and 1 national transport centre. It handles more than 854 million parcels and transports more than 12 million tons of goods each year.

About the Craemer Group

The Craemer Group is a specialist for metal forming, plastics processing and tool making with five European sites and an international customer base. In the field of plastics processing, Craemer is one of the leading developers and manufacturers of high-quality plastic pallets and storage and transport containers for various industries and applications.

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