

How to create

A PRODUCTIVE PACKING STATION



TRESTON

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How to create a productive packing station

Plan a Lean, ergonomic and sustainable station that increases efficiency

Is there any business these days, big or small, which has no need to optimize its packaging and logistics process? E-commerce is everywhere as more and more business goes online. Web stores emerge and grow for both B2C and B2B. Most recently, the appearance of the Covid-19 virus in our lives has motivated consumers to stay home, shop online and make every business think about e-commerce and how to align with the new needs. There is no going back to the old; buying habits have changed forever.

A flawless fulfilment process, packing, unpacking and shipping play an ever more important role for

brands, which aim to attract and retain customers, as well as keep skilled workforce at peak performance and productive.

This guide helps you to plan a Lean, ergonomic and sustainable, efficient and highly competitive manual packing station.

The solutions discussed here serve small web shops and start-ups as well as retailers, mass merchandisers and large logistics centres, every company dealing with manual packing in one way or another.





An ideal packing station

An ideal manual packing station serves the business and employee needs for years to come, securing the investment.

How can it serve for years? How do we know what the world will look like, what are the needs of the future? We don't, but a packing station with certain features will help accommodate changing needs.

- The ideal packing station is Lean compatible. It can be easily modified according to new needs and adjusted for the task at hand.
- It is ergonomic and customizable for the person performing the job, increasing job satisfaction and motivation, reducing work related health problems, constraints and sick leave.
- It is sustainable. High quality combined with great functionality means a long-lasting solution supporting sustainability strategy.

Why invest in a packing station?

If a logistics hub sends out 1000 parcels a week, shortening the lead time by only 30 seconds per parcel can save 8 hours in working time per week. Lead time is an important KPI of packing stations.

In bigger logistics hubs, automated warehousing and filling technologies are increasing but hand packing stations will continue to be an important part of the complete process. Besides outbound parcels returns are also increasing as is the cost of processing them.

According to recent studies, return rates to stores are around 8% and around 25% for items bought online¹. This means much more manual inspection of returns will also be required. If you want to stay competitive, you need to think not only about the packing but also the unpacking efficiency. Unpacking efficiency is also needed with reception of products entering the warehouse, before being packed for delivery to the customer.

For smaller online shops, which are constantly emerging, it is smart to invest far-sightedly in high quality modular and scalable packing stations, which can be easily expanded according to the next steps of business. Not everyone can afford automated packaging solutions to start with. If you have a well-functioning, optimized manual packing station, there is no need for automation before the business scales up significantly.

In big and small companies alike, another point to consider is how conveniently and seamlessly the packing station is combined with material flows before and after packing. 30 seconds can be lost with poor planning of the entire process. The use of modular pack stations allows those in a supporting role to refill consumables while the packer continues uninterrupted.

However, maybe the most important reason to invest in a packing station is people. Manual packing and unpacking need motivated people to do a good job. To ensure there are enough skilled employees to handle this manual work as fluently and flawlessly as possible, it is crucial to pay attention to ergonomics and the wellbeing of your staff. Employees who are satisfied with their work have ten

times less sickness absences compared to their unsatisfied colleagues². A satisfied employee is also on average 12% more productive, whereas an unsatisfied employee is 10% more inefficient than an average employee².

Proper packing facilities enable well-organized processes and job satisfaction and contribute to improvement in the lead time. Thanks to well-designed packing stations – and fluent processes – there are fewer mistakes, less waste, good motivation, less absenteeism, and finally, a better quality of product and a better customer experience – all of which justify the investment.

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How to compete in the eCommerce world

To meet logistics' and consumers' expectations most companies are being pulled into Omnichannel fulfilment. It is not unusual for companies to be quite unorganized in their initial attempt to accommodate the need for manual packing stations. We offer an opportunity for them to increase efficiency, while decreasing the required footprint. This enables them to compete in the eCommerce world and meet the growing demand for eCommerce sales.

The other aspect of our benches is that with our accessories on arms, items like printers, keyboards, void fill machines, etc., are removed from the work surface itself, allowing for a clean, open space for packing. Some customers are used to needing a large packing bench due to the items they store on it and the workspace. But with our benches and upright accessories, they can usually go with a smaller bench, which saves them money, while increasing their efficiency.

One of the key points we see with our packing customers is the reduction of 'touches'. With materials, void fill, boxes, etc., all within easy reach, well-stocked right at the workstation, packages are packed much faster, meaning items are out the door to customers quicker leading to greater customer satisfaction. In the 'age of Amazon', increasing productivity is essential to growing business, and saving those arm motions helps them compete.

Dan Smith
National Sales Manager, Treston inc.

Viewpoints to packaging

Packing and packaging are more topical than ever

Logistics is the backbone of modern life. E-Commerce continues to grow and there is an urgent need to optimize production and logistics chains and packing as part of this.

While packing efficiency is in the spotlight and often found critical, the package itself has a significant impact on the price formation of the product as well as the shipping costs. Packaging must withstand long transports at the lowest possible cost and still be able to protect its contents and to delight the recipient.

Besides the cost formation, the package has also become a brand's business card conveying a promise to meet and even exceed the customer's expectations.

It is important to find a good balance between the interests of all the stakeholders involved: customers, brand owners, manufacturers, logistics operators and employees.

Customers' expectations for packaging have increased

Customer experience is a priority for successful brands. It is a constant challenge to ensure an excellent customer experience, as consumers' expectations and values often change quickly.

These days the package can be as important to the experience as the product inside it. It communicates the nature of the brand and helps set it apart from the competition. (2) It is undoubtedly essential for the consumer that the value inside the package is delivered as expected – normally as fast as possible – and kept safe and sound to delight the recipient at a reasonable cost. Today's end users appreciate a more personal touch in packages, and aesthetics can make a big difference.

There is also a growing demand for sustainability. The consumer may be annoyed if there is an abundance of packaging material or too much plastic used, which is perceived as an environmental problem. Recyclability or reusability of the packaging material has become mainstream in many markets. A sense of responsibility should also be wrapped in the package.

Customer experience is one of the key reasons why attention should be paid to manual packing stations and a careful fulfilment process. A well-designed hand packing station and packing operations can tick all the expectation boxes and lift the customer experience to a new level giving the company a competitive edge, differentiation and advantage in the pricing game.

Video: Personalized note on a package can exceed the expectations of a customer

<https://vimeo.com/461419351/cdf124aaac>

Employees' experience is affecting productivity

Today, we understand that where there are people working, it is essential to pay attention not only to safety but also to ergonomics. The human factor is essential in a manual packing process.

Employee satisfaction and engagement brings savings through improved productivity and less errors; it minimizes sick leave and employee turnover, reducing recruiting costs and onboarding expenses.

In terms of motivation, it is important that employees influence their own working environment. The staff need to feel heard to commit and engage. For example, choosing customizable and individually adjustable packing tables as well as lighting is a good starting point.

Furthermore, a positive employee experience contributes to a strong employer brand, which helps in finding and retaining knowledgeable packing personnel.

Benefits of ergonomics to the EMPLOYER

- Improves occupational safety and reduces sickness absences
- Improves employees' performance
- Reduces occupational health care costs
- Increases productivity and efficiency
- Motivates and engages employees

Benefits of ergonomics to the EMPLOYEE

- Improves employee's health and wellbeing
- Healthy and safe working environments promote the ability to work and also have a positive effect on the ability to function during leisure time
- More satisfaction for your work

Employees who are satisfied with their work have ten times less sickness absences compared to their unsatisfied colleagues.²

Unsatisfied employees are 10% more inefficient than an average employee whereas a satisfied employee is on average 12% more productive.²

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Lean packing station for efficient fulfilment

Processes should be carefully designed and well known by the packing personnel to ensure that packaging materials are used efficiently, avoiding waste and damage, and the time devoted for packing is optimal.

Process constraints can be analysed and fixed by applying Lean thinking in everyday packing actions. Lean means continuous improvement for better productivity and for a better user experience. (For more information, see Treston e-book 'LEAN thinking perfects production processes'.)

Logistics chains changing requirements

Well-designed and implemented logistics chains are crucial to the competitiveness of brands. The role of the package depends on the product to be packed, but smart packaging makes it easier, faster and cheaper to transport the product through the logistics chain.

An ideal packaging and fulfilment process requires transparency and predictability, efficiency, agility and flexibility.

Next generation packaging may require that the packages are sturdier to optimize the use of space in transportation and trucks in the era of blockchain technology and to withstand rough handling. Also, demands for enabling real time package tracking are increasing.

1

Make your packing station **Lean**

At a Lean packing station, no time is wasted on searching for items, the process runs smoothly and predictably without interruptions and the station enables continuous improvement resulting in better efficiency, less waste and damage, savings in materials, time and space, and improved customer satisfaction.

How to create such a Lean station? To start with, the entire process needs to be analysed. Every item needed to run the process at the station should have its designated place. When everything needed is at hand and easy to use, you can reduce unnecessary steps, reduce mistakes and easily see if there is going

to be shortage of some materials. It is then easy to clean and adjust to the needs of the next person to use it.

In a Lean process the employee knows how much time or materials it should take to complete a task with a minimum of waste or damage.

As there is always room for improvement, modularity and a large offering of accessories enable continuous improvement of the fulfilment flow best known by the actual user.



2

Make your packing station ergonomic

Proper ergonomics in packing stations improve employees' health and wellbeing as well as occupational safety, reduces sickness absences resulting in cost savings, and boosts productivity. It can be a decisive factor when competing for skilled and motivated workers, which again increases the efficiency.

How to create an ergonomic station? You should choose a packing station that is highly adjustable and customisable, easy to fit to the needs and priorities of the user. It should be designed with a user in mind, taking into account the workers' needs and physiology, such things as distances of items, height adjustability, and reachability of accessories

'I've seen cheap wobbly benches with sharp corners, which scratch the hands of the user. Often they cannot be adjusted in any way. Nowadays, especially with an ageing workforce, packing solutions with poor ergonomics increase musculoskeletal disorder related absences and demotivate personnel, which can lead to increased sick leave. This can be 100 times more expensive for the company than investing in a proper packing station.'

Thierry Peron, Treston



helping to avoid unnecessary movements. Investigate the history of the bench provider – do they have experience with producing ergonomic workstations?



One often overlooked but important aspect of an ergonomic station is the lighting. Proper and individually adjustable lighting reduces mistakes and fatigue and makes it easy, for example, to examine items that have been returned. Inspection of product returns is one of the key processes nowadays and one where companies have a big saving potential. Inspections need to be done quick and accurately due to big volumes. From employees they need a lot of concentration and can also be very physical.

In an ergonomically designed Lean packaging process, the needed items not only have a designated place, but it is where it is optimal for the person using them. A lean and properly organized, customized and individually adjustable packing station in a clean, well-lit and safe working environment makes working more convenient and mitigates unhealthy stress.

3

Make **sustainable** choices

Sustainability aspects can definitely tip the scale for today's customers, but these days sustainable choices can also mean savings for the company. Sustainability aspects can also play a crucial role in the overall company strategy.

Choosing a high quality, modular and adaptable ergonomic packing station means the product will have a long lifetime. This decreases the need for a new station and thus a new production cycle along with new raw materials, energy, and transportation costs, all of which burden the environment. High quality thus means a sustainable choice as well as a secure investment.

Choosing a modular and adjustable packing table enables you to create a packing process where waste of materials is minimized and unnecessary steps eliminated, also reducing consumption of energy.

Finally, the bench itself should be recyclable, and its manufacturing process should support sustainability aspects to minimize the environmental burden.



4

Efficiency comes along

Workstations designed with Lean principles and ergonomics in mind, increase motivation and productivity. Efficiency is the end result of a Lean, ergonomic and sustainable station.

Skilled and motivated packing personnel along with well-designed, high quality packing stations and optimized processes – ready to adjust to changes and changing needs – make companies efficient and highly competitive.



See Bol.com customer case: <https://www.treston.com/about-us/customer-stories/bolcom-e-commerce-fulfilment-center-chose-treston-modularity>



5

Checklist for creating your competitive manual packing station

To create a competitive and future-proof packing station, analyse your processes against your goals and check the following points before making your choices about vendors.

1. What are you packing?

- The size and weight of the items being packed. These determine the needed size and durability of the packing bench.
- The nature of the items being packed. This determines what kind of packing materials or tools you need to store in and around the packing station, which in turn affects what kind of accessories are needed around.
 - Do you use tape or label dispensers, cartons, computers and keyboards, printers, scanners, staple guns, air tools, filling systems, cutters, toolboxes, bins, banding or other equipment in the packing station? If you do, what kind of accessories do you need for operating these tools efficiently and smoothly? Where do you want them to be placed for efficiency and ergonomic reasons?
 - If you need cartons, consider if you need to have a designated place for cartons on the bench or do you wish to use a separate carton trolley next to the bench.

2. What kind of tasks need to be carried out at the station?

- Listing the needed actions to be done helps to determine what kind of accessories you need next to or at the bench.
 - Picking?
 - Packing?
 - Quality checking?
 - Freight documents?
 - Stamping?
 - Labelling?
 - Printing and reading of picking lists?
 - Weighing?

3. How often do you pack?

- The more regularly you pack, the more important proper ergonomics become in the packing station in order to avoid musculoskeletal disorder (MSD) related problems caused by repetitive moves and loads on, e.g. wrists. Customizability and accessories play an important role here.
- If the station is in heavy use, it serves best when places for all tools and materials are optimized to save time and effort.
- The quality of a heavily used station is essential in ensuring a long-lasting solution.
- If the workstation is adjusted at least once per day, for example when the work shifts change, a manually adjustable bench, e.g. with a hand crank, is good. If there is a need to adjust the height more than once a day, for example because the packaged goods vary in size, and the bench needs to be adjusted higher or lower for different sizes, or if the packing personnel prefers to both sit and stand during the packing shift, it is highly recommended that an electric adjustable bench is selected.

4. How many people use the packing station?

- If there are several users who vary by height and reach, an electronically height-adjustable table is a must.
- Individual needs for proper work lighting also vary. Choose adjustable lighting for packing personnel to control dazzle and reflections.

5. What is the workflow and process around the packing station?

- Is the packing station connected to material flow solutions? Does the packing table need to adjust to manual or automated conveyer belts? Do the tables need to be side-by-side? How do the items being packed arrive and leave the packing station? How are packing materials and supplies brought to or filled into the packing station? Do you need trolleys for transporting packages from or to the packing bench?
- Are there other additional products and accessories needed to support Lean processes? Do you need, for example, trolleys or FiFo flow racks? Do the chair and lighting solutions support an efficient packing processes? Can you get these from the same vendor easily?

6. How long lasting and sustainable solution are you looking for?

- What is the expectation for calculated Return of Investment? Are you searching for a sustainable solution?
 - High quality products may cost a bit more in the investment phase but their lifetime is longer and value better in a longer term.
- Anticipate future needs and ensure availability of add-ons and accessories. Is the company providing the solution a start-up or do they have experience with ergonomic solutions?

Treston is a global leader in

ergonomic industrial furniture and workstations

For more than 50 years, Treston has designed and manufactured high quality industrial and technical furniture. Treston's modular packing benches are highly functional, ergonomic and customized for the person performing the job.

We provide both out-of-the-box packing bench solutions as well as customized packing stations both of which will serve for decades. Both also serve changing needs with their large selection of accessories. Treston offers the largest selection of accessories in the market.

Benches are complemented with a wide variety of add-ons such as sit-stand chairs, lighting solutions, trolleys and flexible and efficient storage solutions such as FiFo Flow Rack.



Treston Packing Bench

The Treston Packing Bench TPB is an efficient all-in-one packing bench. Adjustable and extendable, with 50+ accessories. Stepless height adjustment. Max load 300 kg.



Concept bench

A versatile workbench. Many sizes, the widest range of accessories on the market. Available with ESD protection. Available with allen key height adjustment (max load 500 kg), with electric height adjustment (max load 400 kg) or with a hand crank (max load 200 kg).



See what our customers say

Bol.com e-commerce fulfilment centre chose Treston for modularity

Bol.com new fulfilment centre in Waalwijk, the Netherlands, was opened at the end of 2017. The huge e-commerce logistics warehouse was designed completely from scratch. The target was to make it as efficient as possible, ensure the orders leave the centre the quickest way possible, but also to make it ergonomic and nice for the operators. Treston Workstation solutions were chosen thanks to their modularity.

Read more: <https://www.treston.com/about-us/customer-stories/bolcom-e-commerce-fulfilment-center-chose-treston-modularity>

Christie's, NYC: Custom packing solution delivers form and function for fine arts auction house

Christie's Auction House in New York City needed a packing bench solution that could handle careful wrapping of large, high value artwork. The need for a large working space with easy access to packing materials resulted in a customized workstation made from standard Treston components. Treston's large offering of standard packing benches and accessories made it possible to design a workspace that met Christie's needs, while also providing speedy delivery.

Read more: <https://www.treston.com/about-us/customer-stories/christies-nyc-custom-packing-solution-delivers-form-and-function-fine>

Sneak peek into the future of packing

The logistics sector will continue in the constant quest for new cost saving and efficient solutions and processes.

New recyclable, yet durable and light, packaging materials are expected to continue to emerge. Tomorrow's packaging needs to be smart, personalized, and sustainable. This is what customers and societies expect, alongside fast and accurate deliveries at reasonable costs.

In the fulfilment process, even though the role of automation has been increasing for several reasons, i.e. a shortage of skilled workers or the need for high volume standard quality, the need for manual packing stations will remain. The human factor will remain significant for controlling variation and quality of customer experience, and the human touch will be an appreciated sign of responsibility and high quality.

Heavy and repetitive operations will, however, be left to cobots or robots, while human touch and control will finalize the customer experience. Cobots, small collaborative robots without fences, will come

to work side-by-side with humans, entering various packing industry processes (5). Cobots will take care of the most boring, repetitive and ergonomically challenging or difficult job phases next to the person working at the packing station. They take care of simple tasks like reaching to fetch the correct packaging materials or to move heavy loads. Well-planned and engineered, this combination will enable ageing personnel to avoid injuries and stay active, happy and productive at work.

Internal material flow will be increasingly taken care of by mobile industrial robots, MIRs. Autonomous mobile robots, AMR, are already fetching items independently today.

In the future, the best, winning combination at the packing station will be collaboration of humans and robots, AMRs and cobot combinations. An optimal fulfilment process will contain a mixture of automation, artificial intelligence, robotics, cobotics and humans. Humans and machines will complete each other and work side-by-side at a packing station to create a high quality fulfilment process.

