



WHITE PAPER

Building Flexibility for the 'Future-Proof' Warehouse

The warehouse is no longer just a storage facility. It's a strategic asset that is central to meeting changing demands. As the intralogistics sector shapeshifts, driven by e-commerce growth, sustainability objectives, and technological innovations, businesses are reimagining their warehouses and reevaluating what their operations need to stay competitive in the future. The right materials handling fleet can be a critical success factor.

Future focused warehousing

Europe, the Middle East and Africa is a region experiencing a logistics transformation. Reports suggest that online retail sales in Western Europe alone may exceed €700 billion by 2026 as e-commerce continues to surge. This growth is driving demand for faster, more flexible fulfilment solutions.

The rise of omnichannel retailing is also placing pressure on warehouses to become more agile, responsive, and technologically integrated. Warehouses that fail to adapt may struggle with outdated layouts, limited scalability, and inefficient materials handling equipment that cannot keep pace with fluctuating demand or diverse product types.

Meanwhile, going green is becoming an essential, not an option. The European Logistics & Supply Chain sustainability report 2024 found that 92% of logistics operators and 79% of manufacturers and retailers have corporate sustainability policies. Moreover, one-third of companies require supply chain partners to make sustainability targets a contractual obligation. While this environmental shift may require change, it also generates opportunities. More than 40% of those surveyed by the report stated they had won customers due to their sustainability practices.

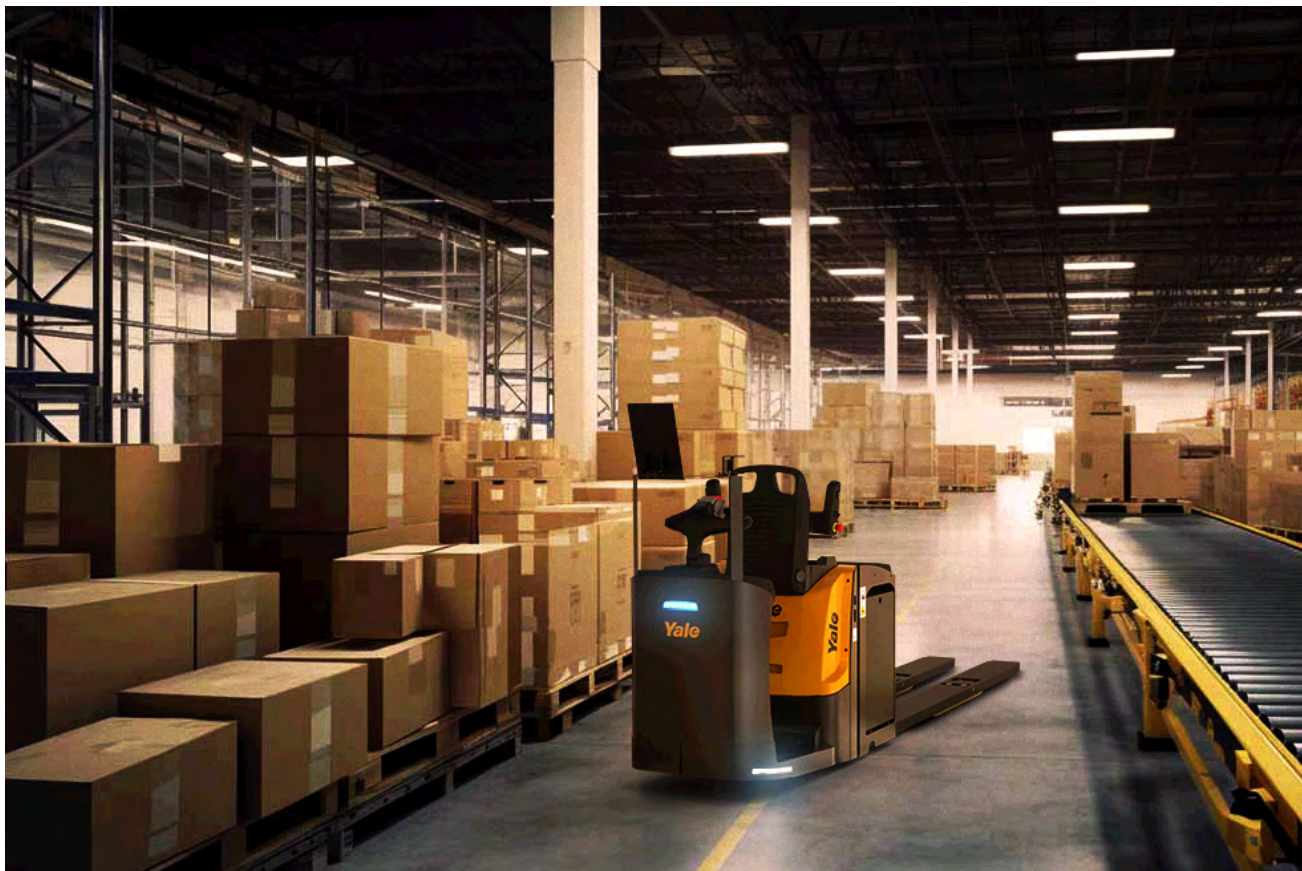
However, sustainability may come at a cost. Warehouses with high sustainability credentials can command a 19% price premium and recouping this added investment could take several years.

Automation and robotics are also redefining warehousing. From autonomous mobile robots (AMRs) to AI-driven inventory systems, warehouses are becoming smarter and more efficient. Collaborative robots, or "cobots", are increasingly common, with the mobile cobot market projected to grow to \$8.8 Billion by 2033. However, helping human operators to optimise productivity and accuracy may require smart equipment investments in other non-automated equipment.

Micro-fulfilment centres (MFCs) and shared logistics hubs are another area gaining traction, which is changing the face of some warehouses, and could impact the solutions to keep it moving.

MFCs are found particularly in urban areas where space is limited and fast delivery expectations are high. These decentralised sites enable faster last-mile delivery and can reduce some operating expenses. However, the initial investment in technology, infrastructure, materials handling equipment, and labour may be significant. Having the right strategy in place will be the foundation for efficiency and success.





The cost of inflexibility

When warehouses remain constrained by outdated infrastructure, rigid processes, and materials handling equipment that isn't ready to grow with the business, this can lead to inefficiencies, higher operational costs, and missed opportunities. For example, single-purpose trucks may struggle to handle a varied product mix, while lift trucks without a compact footprint may struggle to navigate warehouses with decreasing space. Especially as businesses increase inventory density to meet rising customer expectations.

Inflexible systems also hinder scalability. As order volumes fluctuate, such as during peak seasons, warehouses need equipment fleets that can scale up or down without compromising performance. Without this adaptability, businesses risk bottlenecks, delays, and dissatisfied customers. Issues that can erode brand loyalty and impact the bottom line.

As the logistics landscape continues to progress, warehouses that fail to future-proof may find themselves locked out of opportunities. Facilities that rely on outdated, energy-inefficient equipment may struggle to meet new emissions standards or meet the green credentials of their customers.

However, those that master flexibility in their warehouse operations can gain a strategic advantage and thrive. Intelligent, and adaptable materials handling equipment is a powerful starting point. The right lift truck and warehouse equipment fleet can not only support current operational needs but also provide the scalability, connectivity, and efficiency required to navigate future challenges. Whether it's reconfiguring workflows, expanding handling capabilities, or adopting new technologies, flexibility is a cornerstone of long-term resilience.

Flexible solutions for dynamic operations

So, what might flexibility look like for fleets in forward-thinking warehouses?

Customisation

Moving beyond an 'off the shelf' solution when selecting forklifts. Instead selecting models that can be precisely tailored to exact requirements from the outset, not retrofitted, and no need to 'make do' with a machine that is less than fit for purpose. The Yale Series N forklift series is a great example of a fully configurable model that can be specified to application needs directly from the factory to increase versatility and reduce unnecessary costs.

Environmental adaptability

Separate trucks for use outdoors and indoors is the traditional model in many warehouses. However, some reliable equipment may be engineered to be versatile enough to work across different environments. Not only saving on fleet acquisition costs, but also saving time. For instance, the configurable and flexible Yale MR016-20 outdoor reach truck can be used for vehicle to warehouse movements, for a seamless transition between outside and inside.

Multi-purpose trucks

One truck for one purpose may not be an adequate solution when requirements change or activity peaks. Equipment investments made now, need to stand up in future, and not become redundant if and when stock, site, or infrastructure changes. Multi-purpose equipment that is agile enough to complete a wide range of different tasks can be a true asset in the quest for warehouse flexibility. The Yale order picker pallet truck exemplifies this. Tailored for high-frequency picking tasks, compact for limited warehouse space, and effective for loading and unloading lorries as well. The same truck can be applied to different tasks as requirements evolve.



Preparing for what comes next

As warehouses look to the future, flexibility and resilience go hand in hand. Investing in equipment that can pivot to evolving needs will help better position intralogistics operations to respond to market shifts, regulatory changes, and customer expectations.

Release the potential of your warehouse. Locate your local Yale dealer at www.yale.com.