

# RIGHT-SIZED packages check a lot of boxes

As automated packaging equipment and software mature, the payback grows, too.

BY AMANDA LOUDIN, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Outdoor clothing maker Helly Hansen has a reputation for producing high-quality products for skiers, hikers and sailors. And, baked into its DNA is a commitment to sustainability. Front and center on its website you'll find this: "Helly Hansen was born in the environment. It's our duty to protect it."

To meet that mission, however, Helly Hansen needed to overhaul its packaging practices. Its old approach was labor intensive, based on standard and theoretical data from its warehouse management system (WMS), and most critical, it involved a mishmash of boxes and fill materials, leading to waste. To mitigate its packaging

issues, the company turned to right-sizing, partnering with automated packaging solutions provider Ranpak.

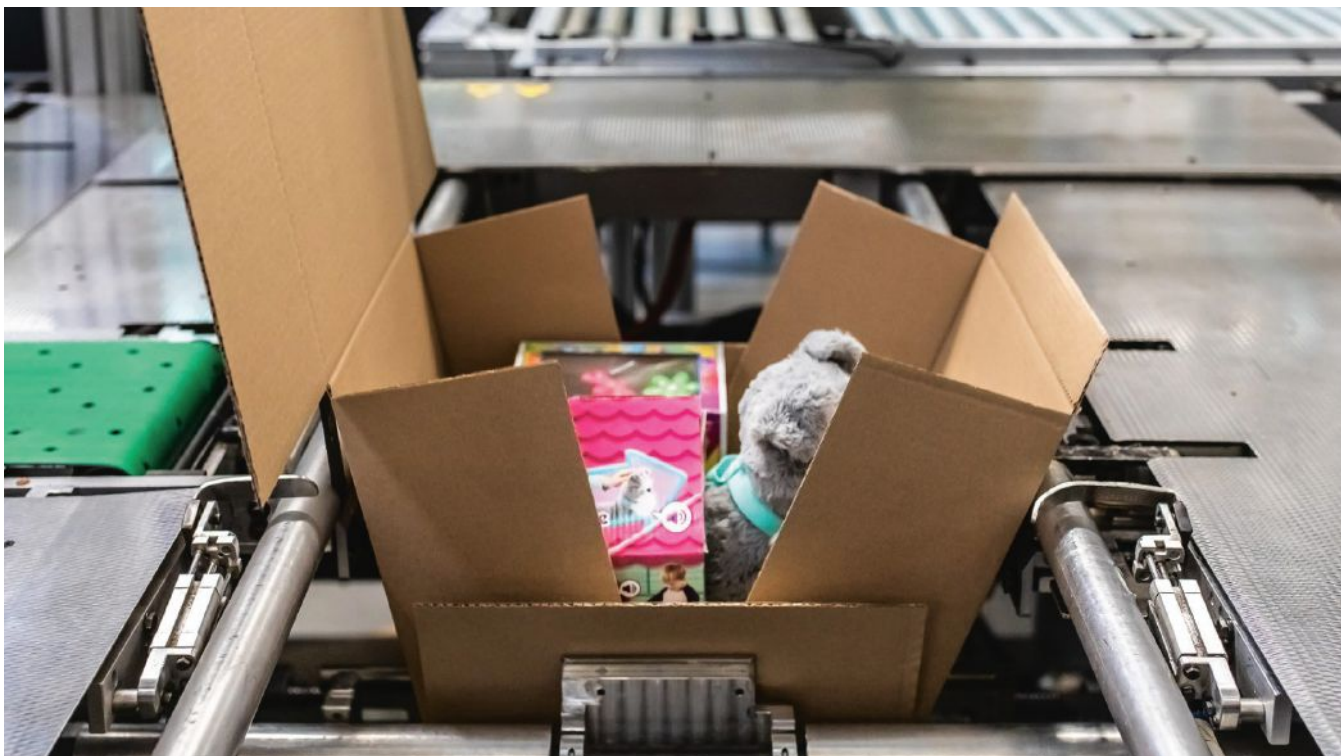
Together, Ranpak and Helly Hansen mapped out a new layout and equipment mix that streamlined the clothing maker's shipping operations. Helly Hansen added an automated, end-of-line configuration, a box erector and a right-sizing machine.

The latter automatically shortens cartons to match their highest point of filling before gluing a tamper-evident lid in place. This arrangement cut down on a theft problem the company had experienced and eliminated wasteful packaging and materials.

The results include reduced labor costs, tripled throughput, better data visibility, and the addition of loss prevention. All told, the project helped Helly Hansen put sustainability front



**One of the easiest ways to get in the right-sizing game is mobile dimensioning equipment.**



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and center, meeting both cultural and customer expectations.

Helly Hansen is among a growing number of companies turning to right-sized packaging to meet sustainability goals, among other benefits. According to James Malley, co-founder and CEO at Paccurate, “there are many factors driving the adoption” of right-sized packaging.

One of the big ones? Gen Z. “There’s a shift underway in e-commerce, and GenZ is becoming the dominant segment,” says Malley. “They are the first generation that will change buying behaviors if they think a company is wasteful.”

That’s a major risk for brands who increasingly depend on e-commerce for their revenue streams. So strong is the GenZ demand for sustainability that even the C-suite is starting to take note,

according to Malley. This generation also expects their products to arrive undamaged and loves a good unboxing experience. Put that together, and right-sized packages check a lot of boxes.

“It’s what customers want, and it’s where the industry is going,” says Bryan Boatner, global managing director for automation at Ranpak.

For a warehouse involved in packing and shipping, the case for right-sized packaging amounts to dollar signs, on many different fronts.

### **The business case for right-sizing**

As packaging becomes a bigger element in warehousing operations, and upper management takes notice, companies often stumble through attempts at fixing their issues.

“Someone will notice that profitability is hurting due to damage,” says Malley.

“They issue a mandate to fix the issue, and if IT is busy, they might kick it down the road to the packaging manager.”

There, the manager may try to solve the problem with more bubble wrap, which inevitably fails. Customers are unhappy with the lack of sustainable packaging, transportation costs go up, and so do other costs. A seemingly simple problem to solve has led to more problems to tackle.

Thanks to the payback from right-sizing, however, customers are increasingly looking to automated solutions. “The benefits are tangible,” says Cameron Stout, senior director of strategic partnerships at Packsize. “We’ve put together before and after snapshots of parcel shipping rates for our customers, and the total impact is often around \$1.10 per order.”

Stout counts among the savings a



**Data master and cartonization software can analyze historical order data and then simulates machine utilization and box fill rates for future scenarios.**

reduction in corrugated, reduction in void fill, lower dimensional weight costs, and the automation itself, which reduces labor costs. “We’ve measured corrugated reduction at about a third of what is needed otherwise,” he points out. “And when it comes to damage, you can see about a 12% reduction, which is important. No one wants to receive something that’s broken.”

According to Stout, surveys show that 80% of customers prefer their packages arrive in corrugated and with less void fill. “The pandemic changed things because everyone was shopping online and noticing how much waste came along with their packages,” he says. “Now, they have choices and want sustainable options.”

A less tangible benefit, says Malley, is that automated packaging can often uncork bottlenecks. “If you’ve got autonomous mobile robots (AMRs) on the floor

to help with labor costs, eventually, your payback period slips,” he explains. “Automated packaging can get you back on track, which makes it a bigger priority.”

Beyond customer demands, many countries have sustainability regulations in place. The European Union, for instance, issued new regulations this year. They cover targets for packaging recyclability, a reduction in empty space ratios, and impose limits on void fill. Additional requirements will kick in during 2028 and again in 2030, so if you’re doing business with European partners, it’s important to understand what’s involved.

### **Right-sizing in action**

Perhaps the best news for companies looking to optimize their packaging operations is that there’s a plethora of solutions, from the very simple to the very complex. Improving your packaging

operations is low-hanging fruit and easy to accomplish, depending on the scale of your requirements.

One of the easiest ways to get in the game is mobile dimensioning equipment, according to Matt Miller, president and CTO of MobileDemand, a tablet-based system. “Users can collect data wherever the item is, often in 90 seconds,” he explains. “That’s much quicker than fixed systems you need to travel to and acquisition costs are much cheaper.”

After capturing weights, dimensions and photos, the MobileDemand system feeds into a master database that flows to software, which determines the right-sized boxes. “It’s flexible and scalable, and it’s easy to deploy,” Miller adds.

More sophisticated—and more expensive—systems can operate in very high-volume warehouses. CMC Solutions, for instance, counts Ama-





BOXES



IRREGULAR



PALLETS



OVERSIZED



SMALL



FLAT

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