

Online and on time

Since its introduction in 1999, e-commerce has become big business for many UK retailers. But while it is effective in reducing overheads, the reputation of a company's business now increasingly depends on its ability to deliver the goods on time, every time, as there is little other direct contact with customers.



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Trade Appliances is the UK's leading independent retailer of built-in kitchen appliances and white goods, offering over 6,000 different products from the world's leading manufacturers. The majority of orders are received through the internet, although customers can also order by phone or visit a showroom. Therefore efficient and customer-facing delivery methods are key to the company's success.

Trade Appliances has a dedicated 10-strong vehicle fleet delivering goods throughout the UK. However, the company identified a need to work with a logistics provider to enhance its delivery services to areas of the country it could not serve cost effectively and efficiently, such as the South West and Scotland.

After researching a number of pallet networks, the company chose local transport company Mitchells of Mansfield, based in Sutton in Ashfield and a member of the Palletways distribution network.

Palletways is the largest pallet network in the UK and comprises 100 plus depots operated by established and highly professional independent transport companies, known as Palletways members, who combine each others' resources to deliver goods throughout the UK overnight or on an economy basis via three hub operations in Lichfield, Edinburgh and Greenford.

Mitchells of Mansfield collects products ordered by Trade Appliances' customers from the company's stockholding facility, and then transports them to the appropriate hub depending on the final destination. At the hubs sophisticated information technology

processes the freight and sorts it into designated areas according to the final delivery points in the UK.

Other Palletways members then return to their local depots with the Trade Appliances goods they have been assigned to deliver on behalf of the network and from here they are distributed direct to the customer's door.

Palletways has introduced high-speed connections to the internet at all its depots throughout the UK, including the operation managed by Mitchells of Mansfield, to enable an unrivalled track and trace capability. Data relating to every pallet consignment is sent in real time via the internet to two major servers at a central processing centre.

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By accessing the Palletways website and entering their unique login name, Trade Appliances personnel can access information on the status of any consignment they have put through the network – from point of input into the network system through to the final delivery. This means they can give the best possible customer service and respond to any delivery queries immediately.

Tony Fierek, distribution manager at Trade Appliances, says: "Our reputation relies on our customers receiving their orders on time, and having complete peace of mind that their products are being handled with care throughout the supply chain. We have developed a 'One Hour Delivery Call' service, where a Palletways driver will call the customer one hour before the delivery will be made. The individual can then be available to take receipt of their order rather than having to wait in all day for a non-specific delivery time.

"We have found this service reduces consumer frustrations related to the receipt of goods.

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