

MAILROOM TO GLOBAL WAREHOUSE AUTOMATION BOOM

Alex Stevens, Vice President of OPEX® Corporation, shares how his family's business went from transforming daily mail to supporting the world's largest e-commerce companies with transforming their warehouses.

On a busy Monday evening in New Jersey, USA, Alex Stevens sat down to speak with MHD, located over 16,000 km away in Melbourne, Australia.

OPEX Corporation's Vice President, Warehouse Automation, Alex Stevens'

enthusiasm and pride towards OPEX's successes can be heard all the way from the Mid-Atlantic region of the USA to Oceania through the telephone.

OPEX was at the forefront of an emerging direct mail trend in 1970's America through Columbia Records.

Al Stevens, Alex's grandfather, began the development and production of the first multiple station mail processing machine. In 1975 Al and his wife, Joanna, subsequently bought OPEX. Later, the Stevens' sons, Mark and David, were brought into the business.



OPEX Perfect Pick® HD Goods-to-Person Solution.

"I'm third generation in the family-owned business. Our company is more than 40 years old and it's incredible to look at how the business has changed over time and where we are now. From letter opening and document imaging, to complete warehouse automation solutions," Alex says.

The company is now recognised as a global leader in providing state-of-the-art warehouse automation technologies, document imaging platforms, and high-speed mailroom automation. Today, OPEX systems deliver profitability and efficiency in a variety of settings around the world, including fulfillment operations and distribution centres.

HIGH THROUGHPUT AUTOMATION

Growth in e-commerce has greatly impacted warehouse automation requirements. It's changing fulfillment paths and requiring retailers, distributors, logistics services providers, and manufacturers to expand and reconfigure their fulfillment operations.

Alex says managing the flow of warehouse capabilities is crucial through automation, especially following unprecedented demand during lockdown measures throughout the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Many companies can no longer keep up with their order fulfillment demand, resulting in consumer dissatisfaction. Alex says, the ideal solution is to implement warehouse automation into your order picking and sorting operations.

"We have iBOT® robots that are able to travel vertically and horizontally within a racking structure, allowing an efficient system that's integrated through the racking structure inside warehouses," he says. iBOTs have 100 per cent access to the inventory in their aisle and can be driven through the rack and into pick stations in a matter of minutes, dramatically impacting throughput, even as order volumes change in the warehouse.

Alex says the iBOTs are part of OPEX's "Perfect Pick®" solution. Designed and manufactured by OPEX, Perfect Pick is a unique robotic goods-to-person order picking technology.

According to Alex, traditional automation is complex which means it's time, labour and cost intensive often beyond the reach of growing small to midsize businesses. "By streamlining the picking process, Perfect Pick makes goods-to-person automation feasible for businesses that previously thought it was out of reach," he says.

"It's highly flexible entry-level automation that can scale up quickly to meet changing demand and business cycles by eliminating



Alex Stevens, Vice President of OPEX Corporation.

complex front-end conveyors lifts and other transfer equipment."

APPETITE FOR AUTOMATION

Alex says OPEX has focused on automation systems that gel well into demanding e-commerce operations. "We've been focusing on the explosion in e-commerce sales, and we've been providing solutions to some of the largest e-commerce facilities in North America, as well as expanding our global presence," he says.

In a large fulfillment centre, a typical online order may consist of a number of products and might be located on opposite ends of a facility. Alex says because of the various sizes and shapes of the products that make up an order, efficiently sorting these items remains the bottleneck.

"Sorting individual items into orders can be a labour-intensive and manual process that requires too many steps and way too many touches, valuable warehouse space is wasted on conveyors that transport these items to the next sort location," Alex says.

OPEX utilises a Sure Sort™ smart automation solution based on iBOT delivery

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Perfect Pick is a unique robotic goods-to-person order picking technology.

technology. This robotic item sorter easily handles complex variables and delivers a wide variety of parcels and single items to their final location in a single pass. “While handling a wide range of sizes, packaging, and orientation of items, Sure Sort reads each bar code and delivers items in a single pass at up to 2,400 items per hour,” Alex says.

Alex says iBOTs are directed by Sure Sort’s host software in conjunction with virtually any warehouse automation management system. Once an order is completed, the bin is cleared, and the order tote or shipping container is transported to a packing station in preparation for shipment.

“We’re about providing the next generation of warehouse automation technologies. Our iBOTs look ahead of the next few orders, and if things change you have the ability to change real time orders in the queue. This is the sort of flexibility that is vital for e-commerce growth,” he says.

FOCUSED SOLUTIONS

A global presence is not new to OPEX. The company believes in time, non-U.S. sales could exceed those of its home country. While the company has successful business in more than 40 countries, efforts are still underway to expand its global footprint in the APAC region.

Alex says OPEX has had a presence in Australia since 2015. That was the same year that OPEX was the proud recipient of the NJMEP/NJBIZ Manufacturer of the Year Award at the Made in New Jersey event, held on National Manufacturing Day. Responding to the massive growth in the region, this year OPEX hired Khurshed Mirza, as the Director of Warehouse Automation in Asia Pacific.

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has caused increased uncertainty about future fulfillment requirements, that’s why we believe having an automated and scalable solution is the first warehouse requirement,” he says. “The appetite for automation is already very high, taking advantage of integrated platforms available via technology is a smart move.”

Whilst warehouses across the globe adapt to a new normal following social distancing orders, automation will become a business enhancing tool. Alex says there is huge interest in OPEX solutions as companies recognise the ability to keep up with order fulfillment while having fewer physical staff due to the custom Perfect Pick and Sure Sort systems that minimise people-to-people contact. “Daily operations at warehouses will never be the same, maintaining highly efficient systems that naturally enforce social distancing are essential in this current climate,” he says.

Alex describes OPEX’s solutions as transformative for the warehouse. He credits OPEX’s own manufactured and engineered robotic goods-to-person order fulfillment system as the solution to meet retailers target objectives that includes secure storage of diverse products, maximum productivity with minimal labour and accurate and fast picking.

“Across the globe we provide solutions that are able to provide value for the small e-commerce companies fulfilling a few thousand orders a day, right up to the largest distribution facilities dispatching thousands an hour,” he says.

“As a child, I could never have imagined our family business would be a leading global provider of automated warehouse technologies, so it’s our legacy to continue to provide performance enhancing workflow solutions and cost-effective results to thousands of organisations worldwide.” ■