

NOATUM LOGISTICS GROWTH BEYOND COVID



SINCE WE LAST SPOKE WITH NOATUM LOGISTICS, THE FIRM HAS INVESTED HEAVILY IN ITS FACILITIES AND TECHNOLOGY, ADAPTING TO SERVE THE RAPIDLY GROWING E-COMMERCE SECTOR.

GROWTH BEYOND COVID

PROJECT MANAGED BY: JOHN HOLLIMAN

Noatum Logistics is a leading supply chain 3PL supplier, providing international transport, project shipment, logistics and customs brokerages across 28 countries. The firm boasts 2,600 specialised professionals and is positioned among the top 50 freight forwarders worldwide, forming part of the leading maritime logistics and port services company, Noatum Maritime.

When we last looked at Noatum Logistics the company was at the beginning a period of a great investment, but also barely a month into the first lockdown of the pandemic. Noatum Logistics has been through a lot since then.

"We've been managing things through the Covid pandemic, and with Brexit happening in that period as well it has been quite a challenge managing existing operations," explains Steve Hicks, Managing Director of Noatum Logistics. "In February 2020 we broke ground on the new warehouse just as the pandemic started, so we had big plans but keeping that on track has been a feat."

Like many businesses, the pandemic drove Noatum Logistics to reassess every aspect of its business, and Noatum considered shutting down the plans to build a new warehouse.

"It was a time for a re-evaluation of our investment," Hicks says. "I think the result of that re-evaluation is that it has re-enforced why we were doing this expansion. Not going through with it would have been a mistake for the business. The pandemic has accelerated e-commerce growth by another five years, and we've been ahead of the game in that because we were already setting things up. The market in building new warehouses exploded over the last six-to-nine months." >>



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BS Handling Systems is a Leicester-based company supplying modern sortation, conveyor, warehouse, and storage solutions. As a full-service provider, BS Handling Systems offers complete turnkey project management including design, supply, manufacture, and installation, from small-sized projects to multi-million £ fully integrated systems.

With a wealth of experience in the logistics, sortation, and automation environment, BS Handling Systems has installed many integrated conveyor and sortation systems. These projects have either been standalone or alongside pallet racking, shelving, garment handling systems, and mezzanine floor solutions.

Recent projects have seen BS Handling Systems complete installations for a variety of clients across industry sectors including e-commerce giants, 3PLs, fashion retailers, and the automotive industry. The Leicester-based company has produced installations across the United Kingdom as well as Europe, Dubai, and the Middle East.

The company's key account management strategy ensures contact continuity for every contract and project, from start to completion. With multiple engineering teams on the road throughout the UK, BS Handling Systems is able to back up installations with first-class servicing and call-out cover, giving clients complete peace of mind. In addition to the UK, BS Handling System has also extended its service contract offerings to Europe as well as Dubai (remote).

A Continually Evolving Company

BS Handling Systems has recently sealed an additional product partnership with Wise Robotics to offer flexible and scalable warehouse automation solutions to help make businesses more efficient.

The cutting-edge robotics solutions can be streamlined into existing infrastructures. Controlled by smart business intelligence software, these solutions optimise warehouse and manufacturing operations, speed up fulfillment, and meet the demands of customers now and in the future.

In 2020, BS Handling Systems completed work on its new head office in Leicester featuring modern offices as well as an engineering facility that provides space for product manufacturing, testing, development, and demonstrations.

The new offices also feature a beehive, designed and made by the BS Handling Systems team, using recycled wood from the office refurbishment project. The initiative is to house and protect an organic colony of bees to support the bee population and ecosystem.

As a forward-thinking and employee-focused company, BS Handling Systems has created a meditation room at the new office site. This is to support the well-being of employees and to promote a healthy work and life balance. The meditation room is part of BS Handling Systems' dedication to its social and environmental responsibilities.

In addition to the new head office, BS Handling has launched a new facilities management service provision to its client base. The company is now offering reactive/pre-planned maintenance and cleaning services with full 24/7 customer support across all industry and public sectors.

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NOATUM LOGISTICS

Indeed, looking back now Hicks sees the completion of Noatum's new warehouse as the company's greatest achievement of the last twelve months.

"Our biggest achievement has been getting the ePoint warehouse built. We had a lot of Covid challenges, but we got the keys handed over in December 2020 and managed to complete it on time and on budget. That was a great achievement," Hicks recalls. "We went into a seven-month programme to complete all the work inside- it was like doing up a new house. We had a huge area, a quarter of a million square feet of a mezzanine. We were fitting conveyors, having warehouse management systems designed and installed."

“PEOPLE WILL NEED MORE WAREHOUSE SPACE AND ARE GOING TO NEED STILL MORE OVER THE NEXT COUPLE OF YEARS AS E-COMMERCE CONTINUES TO GROW.”

No sooner was work on the warehouse complete than the space was in demand by Noatum Logistics' customers.

"We went live with our first customer in July, and we were planning to go live this year with one customer in February and one in March. The demand from our existing customers has been far greater than anticipated and ePoint's proximity to London and its eCommerce capability has proven to be a massive draw for new customers," Hicks says.

REDUCING THE RISK

Facilities had to be prepared and running smoothly ready for these customers, as Hicks is keenly aware that changing warehouse provider is a huge and even risky step for a business. >>

“For customers, moving warehouse is a major business decision and a big risk. Most of our customers are in retail, so it’s an area that has always needed investment,” Hicks says. “If you go back, the shops were shut last year for the first four or five months of last year, so when we were saying we were opening in July they were worried about disrupting their supply chain.”

To reassure customers that Noatum Logistics could not only manage this changeover without disruption but could provide benefits to its customers, it pointed to the readiness of its facilities and the value-added service it could provide.

“They could see where we were at, and they were running out of space,” Hicks says. “In the retail marketplace today a lot of the work they do is through e-commerce, and you need a warehouse for that. We offer that alongside a lot of value-added services that would have been done in the shop previously.”

Through 2021 ePoint has been increasingly integrated with Noatum Logistics’ supply chain management platform, which means that customers now have a calendar of inbound stock,

with merchandise scanned into stock on arrival, for immediate visibility and availability on their web sales platforms. Purchases on customers’ websites trigger inventory adjustments, pick lists, courier labels and the confirmation customer email, which incorporates links to initiate Noatum’s returns process.

“And now it’s all about how we continue building on that,” explains Hicks. “People will need more warehouse space and are going to need still more over the next couple of years as

e-commerce continues to grow. We have a competitive offering and are financially more attractive to the customers as well.”

THE POST-COVID MARKETPLACE

E-commerce is not the only sector that has been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The labour marketplace as a whole has seen enormous shifts following the pandemic and Brexit.

“The cost-of-labour has gone up. When you look at the number of job vacancies, it is phenomenal,” Hicks acknowledges.

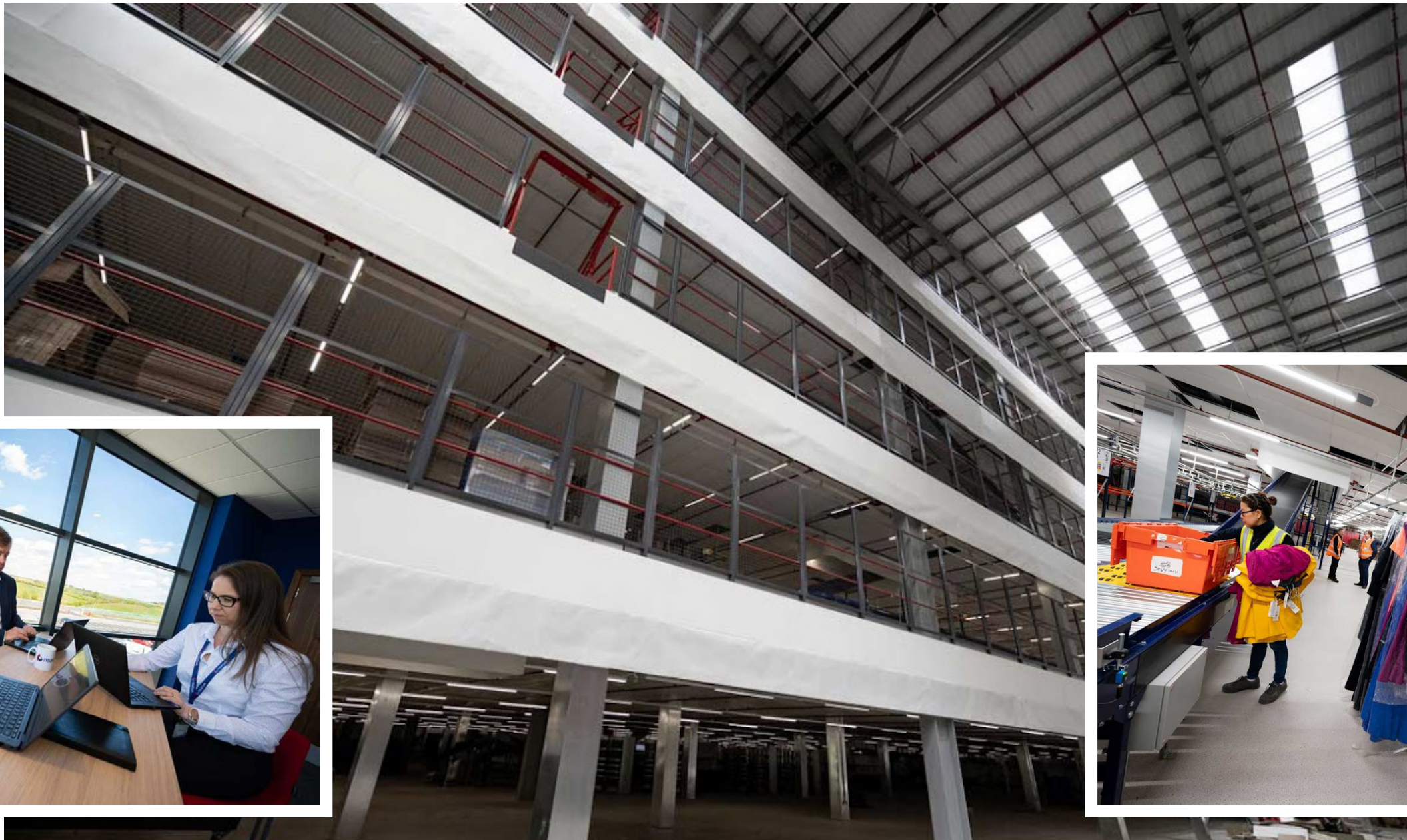
“That is due to Covid, but is also Brexit related. You used to have a lot of Europeans who’d come here to work who have gone back to their own country and it is more difficult for them to come back here. It has been probably our biggest challenge, and this will force us into further automation in the coming years.”

Noatum Logistics has responded with competitive pay, but Hicks points out that financial incentives alone will not solve the market challenges.

“Obviously, market rates have gone up, so we have been paying more, but we are also using softer methods from an HR perspective to make the environment suitable. It’s not just about the money,” Hicks insists. “We try to understand what works for the employees and how we can improve their lot with bus services to help people get to and from the station at the end of shifts. We make their lives more enjoyable while they’re working for us.”

Recent times have been challenging across the board, but by continuing to invest prudently at a time where many businesses were looking to cut expenses wherever possible, Noatum has placed itself in a strong position for the future.

“Going back to 2020, it was a challenging year. Businesses were battenning down the hatches. We didn’t do much investment but what we did has paid dividends,” Hicks tells us. “And now it’s all about how we continue to build on those foundations. So, if I look at where we are, we’ve built the new warehouse, we put in the mezzanine. The warehouse is about 80% full, so we have about 20% of our space available. To get us further in the warehouse sector we’re extending the mezzanine and putting in an automated auto-store. This is a cubed storage solution that will give us the capacity for more customers in the warehouse. That is where our next investment stage is heading.”





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