



Tarkett opens an efficient and sustainable DC in Waalwijk

Interview with Lodewijk van der Zanden, Purchasing Manager EMEA at Tarkett, by Mark Dohmen

Tarkett, an international market leader in innovative floor solutions, moved into its new and largely automated distribution center (DC) in the Dutch city of Waalwijk in 2020. Tarkett enlisted Groenewout's expertise and experience for the construction project, the logistics concept and the warehouse design, among other things. "It was an excellent decision," concludes Project Manager Lodewijk van der Zanden. "We wouldn't have been able to do it without them."

With its 12,500-strong workforce and 36 production locations, every day Tarkett sells 1.3 million square meters of flooring for buildings around the world including hospitals, schools, hotels, offices, shops and residential buildings. Tarkett had always been based in the Dutch town of Oosterhout, but did not start selling carpet-based floor coverings in the Netherlands until 2015, when it acquired the firm called Desso. Since then, it has had a production facility for carpet tiles in Waalwijk. The new DC takes care of the mechanized storage of those carpet tiles and prepares them for dispatch to customers.



Project Manager Lodewijk van der Zanden was pleased with the collaborative relationship with Groenewout: "We worked together closely for two years and the atmosphere was always excellent."

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Safety first

There were several reasons for Tarkett's decision for a brand-new DC, explains Lodewijk van der Zanden. He is Purchasing Manager EMEA and was also in charge of managing the whole project: "The most important reason was safety, both of our employees and of the process. Due to sustained growth, our old warehouse had become too cramped and that sometimes created unclear – and therefore unsafe – situations."

Besides that, the lack of space reduced the company's efficiency because Tarkett was forced to store some of its stock elsewhere. "We even had to rent external storage space eventually, which resulted in unnecessary handling and extra transport," continues Van der Zanden. "Moreover, that put pressure on our delivery reliability and customer service... so there was plenty of room for improvement."



The new 26,000m² distribution center at the Prologis Park Waalwijk logistics complex. Tarkett leases just over half of the total facility.

Right partner

At Tarkett, they soon realized that a semi-automated DC would be the way to address the majority of their wants and needs. However, the company lacked sufficient in-house know-how to successfully manage an automation project. "So we went in search of the right partner," says Van der Zanden. That partner had to fulfill a number of criteria, he explains: "Needless to say, we wanted a partner with a good reputation and with proven knowledge and experience in projects of this kind. Besides that, because it was our first automation project, we were looking for a company that spoke our own language."

Greenfield

Tarkett approached three shortlisted consulting firms with its potential project. Van der Zanden: "In effect, we gave them carte blanche based on a greenfield situation. We asked them to perform high-level data analysis, model various scenarios and come up with a plan of attack. We hadn't even chosen a location at that point." After an evaluation period including several reference visits, the company selected Groenewout. "We immediately felt a click with their pragmatic approach, plus the scenarios they had developed appealed to us the most," recalls Van der Zanden.

Sustainable DC

At Tarkett's request, Groenewout first conducted a location study and a feasibility study for the logistics design of the new DC. The consulting firm developed a total of five scenarios. Ultimately, the semi-automated narrow-aisle warehouse scenario (using automated guided vehicle-controlled electric pallet trucks and narrow-aisle trucks) in Waalwijk was identified as the most suitable solution.

The new DC was built by Prologis, which paid extra attention to sustainability during the design and construction process. The entire 26,000m² building has a BREEAM 'very good' sustainability rating and is also certified in line with the WELL Building standard. That focus on sustainability is a perfect fit with the Tarkett Group's vision, according to the project manager: "We've implemented an eco-innovation strategy based on cradle-to-cradle principles. We also stimulate the circular economy, such as by closing the loop on waste materials and retaining natural resources." Tarkett currently leases more than half (14,000m²) of the 26,000m² DC at the Prologis Park Waalwijk logistics complex.

The location of the site, just a stone's throw from Tarkett's production facility, is also advantageous from a sustainability perspective because the close proximity of the DC to the production activities helps to minimize the transport requirements. "We can shuttle the stock ourselves, and even that will soon be done sustainably thanks to the electric tow tractor we've ordered," states Van der Zanden. Furthermore, the decision to stay in Waalwijk has meant that much of the workforce could remain with the company.

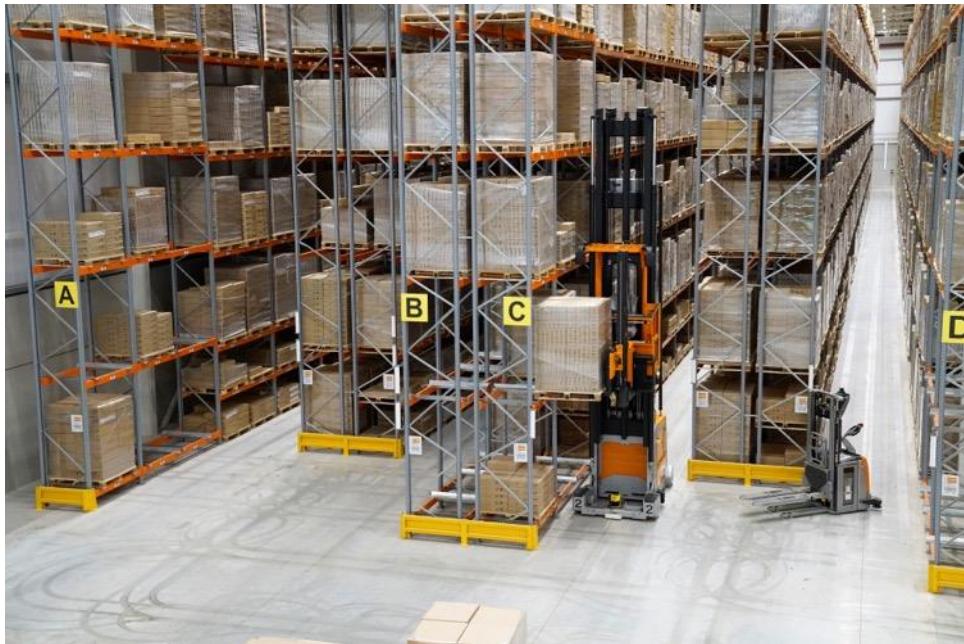
In the context of the building itself, Groenewout drew up the Program of Requirements, coordinated the lease tender process and monitored the planning and the quality right up until completion.

The benefits of automation

Based on the results from its data analysis, Groenewout then prepared a Program of Requirements for the logistics solution, coordinated the realization of the logistics design and supported the WMS project.

A semi-automated narrow-aisle warehouse, supplied and implemented by STILL, was chosen as the logistics solution. Automated series-produced trucks continuously take care of the receipt, storage and retrieval of pallets. Thanks to the process largely being automated now, the warehouse operations are now a lot safer. There are fewer manually operated transport movements in the warehouse, plus the truck routes and the walkways are physically separated which has greatly improved the clarity of the situation.

Besides that, the automation has increased the reliability. "There are fewer mistakes and processes run more efficiently – and that's essential in order to stay at the forefront of a competitive market," adds Van der Zanden.



The logistics processes are now largely automated.

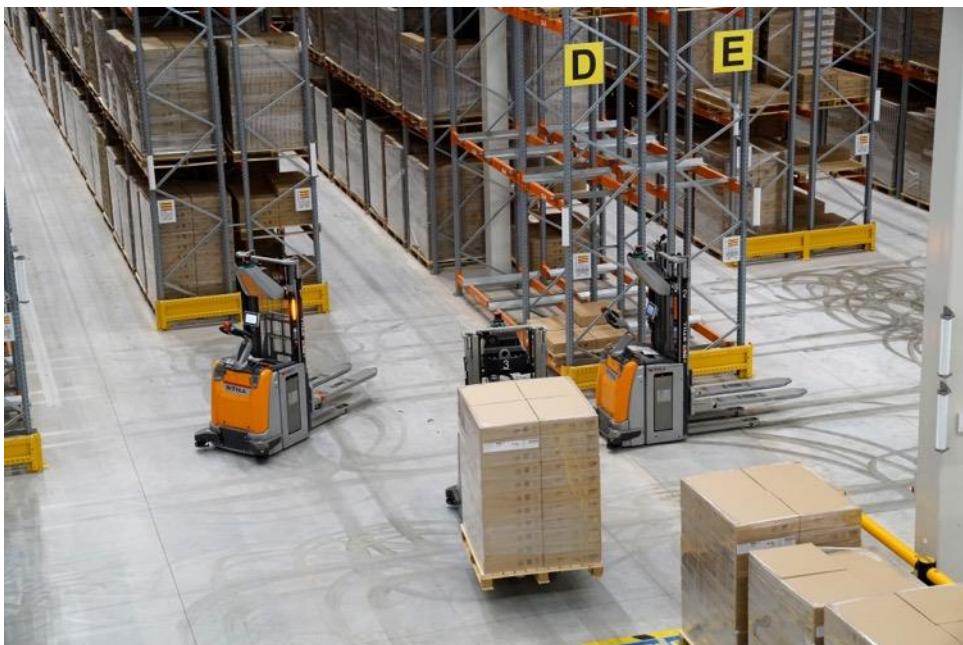
Role model

Looking back, the project manager is very satisfied with the results of the partnership with Groenewout: "They tackled and organized the project very well, including by arranging regular meetings, remaining available at all times and always being open to new ideas or changes. We wouldn't have been able to do it without them. Additionally, Groenewout set up a multidisciplinary team of objective, driven and helpful consultants. We worked together closely for two years and the atmosphere was always excellent. The interaction was consistently honest, genuine, pleasant and yet professional – both with one another and with other parties involved in the project."

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Needless to say, a large-scale project like the one at Tarkett calls for some degree of flexibility because it's inevitable that some things won't go according to plan. "But even those issues were dealt with competently thanks to Groenewout's help. During the construction process, some drawings for the electricity connections were adapted and there were some changes to the sprinkler system, for example, but Groenewout handled those amendments professionally and decisively so that the whole project could still be completed on time and within budget."

The success of this project has laid the groundwork for more, because today the DC in Waalwijk serves as a role model for other Tarkett locations. In fact, there are already concrete plans for further automation within the group; the company hopes to go live with its second automation project before the end of this year.



Thanks to the automation project, Tarkett is assured of a safe, reliable and efficient logistics operation.

About the author

Mark Dohmen has been a journalist in the logistics sector for 25 years. After his degree in logistics management, he worked as an editor of the Dutch trade publications *Transport+Opslag*, *Logistiek* and *Logistiek.nl* and he was chief editor of *Logistiek Totaal* and *Warehouse Totaal*. Nowadays he works freelance, including to produce articles and videos for *logisticsinside.nl* and *logisticsinside.eu*.



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More information

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