



David Kolman

Warehouse on wheels

One of the numerous challenges beverage distributors face is finding ways to reduce operating expenses while maintaining logistics efficiencies and good customer service.

Two Georgia-based distributors took a novel approach to cost-efficiently consolidate and streamline their distribution operations. They are Republic National Distributing Co. of Atlanta, the second-largest distributor of premium wine and spirits in the United States, and Georgia Crown Distributing Co. of McDonough, a full-service beverage distributor selling imported and domestic spirits, wines, beers and specialty products.

The two distributors put in place an innovative delivery system known as Warehouse on Wheels. Developed by Demountable Concepts, Glassboro, N.J., the system allows multiple interchangeable bodies to be loaded at a central location and then shuttled on a tractor trailer or straight truck to regional operating points. Here, the bodies are removed and route trucks pick up the corresponding bodies for their delivery routes.

The truck bodies from the previous round of deliveries are left by the route trucks to be loaded onto the tractor trailer or straight truck and returned to the central location for reloading.

At the core of the Warehouse on Wheels system are specially designed equipment systems that enable a semitrailer to haul up to four interchangeable truck bodies at one time, and a straight truck to transport two such bodies. These equipment systems have an easy-to-operate electric/hydraulic power lift system that raises and lowers the truck bodies. An assembly locks down the bodies to hold them securely in place for transit.

The truck bodies are outfitted with retractable legs, and each truck body stands independently. The body exchange for both the semitrailer and straight truck is basically the same. To demount, the bodies are unlocked, raised vertically enough



Multiple interchangeable bodies are shuttled back and forth to regional markets.

for the legs to put in place, and the vehicle pulls out from under the bodies.

To mount the bodies, special long sills on the truck body guide the chassis as it backs up. Once in position, the legs are returned to their storage location, the bodies are lowered onto the chassis and the lock down system that holds the bodies on the chassis lift is engaged.

Interchanging four bodies on a semitrailer takes less than an hour. It takes about 15 minutes to mount or demount two bodies from a straight truck.

Van bodies can be customized with doors in the front and rear to allow loading and unloading of the bodies while staged on a semitrailer or straight truck. With the Warehouse on Wheels system, Republic National Distributing was able to consolidate its three Virginia warehouse operations into a single centralized distribution center.

Shuttle (transfer) drivers make two trips each night. Four bodies are transported on each shuttle tractor trailer, and route deliveries begin early in the morning.

Georgia Crown Distributing runs a similar type operation. Inventory from

a single centralized distribution center in McDonough is loaded into multiple bodies and shuttled to outlying markets on semitrailers and a straight truck. The empty bodies are mounted and returned to the warehouse for reloading.

Georgia Crown runs five tractor trailers, each with four van bodies, and one straight truck with two bodies. Each body is 12 feet long and is loaded with 350 cases of product.

The loaded bodies are shuttled to regional markets at night to avoid traffic and to have the bodies ready for the delivery trucks to begin their routes first thing each morning.

The system helped make it possible for Georgia Crown Distributing to combine its five warehouses into one. Another advantage of interchangeable type body systems for beverage distributors is they make possible quicker and more consistent restocking of retailers, plus enable the handling of more volume with fewer people.

Moreover, these systems reduce the need for additional truck drivers and help lower fuel costs. Shuttling several bodies together eliminates the need for separate trips by straight trucks. **BI**

David Kolman is a veteran truck communicator, keynote speaker and long-haul trucker. Commissioned as an Honorary Colonel on the Kentucky governor's staff for his work promoting traffic safety, he actively participates in trade associations and reports news and information about the trucking industry for broadcasting and print media.

Straight trucks "swap" bodies for local deliveries.

