

VANDERLANDE

a TOYOTA AUTOMATED LOGISTICS company

CASE STUDY

First-time automation streamlines BONFIX's operations



MOVING YOUR BUSINESS FORWARD



When BONFIX B.V., a Dutch supplier of premium quality fittings for sanitary installations and central heating systems, decided to build a new distribution centre in Zwolle, The Netherlands, it chose Vanderlande as its automation partner. The goods-to-person (GtP) order fulfilment solution FASTPICK is not only helping this family business to manage large volumes of ever-growing orders quickly and efficiently – it's also won over employees by making their jobs more rewarding.

Founded in 1994, BONFIX is a dynamic, ambitious company serving the plumbing contracting market. Over the past 30 years, it has grown rapidly to become one of the leading players in parts for sanitary installations and central heating systems.

According to founder and owner, Marcel R. van Buul, BONFIX's success is down to putting its wholesale customers first, as well as the end user. "We are always prioritising the needs of the plumber – the most important person in our company," he explains. "They may not be working here, but they use our products every day, and we listen to them."



Handling short lead times – and peaks

In 2023, BONFIX built a new facility on a greenfield site adjacent to its existing warehouse. The company needed a building for the high-storage density it requires to expand while maintaining its reputation for high customer service.

“We have actually enjoyed explosive growth at BONFIX for years, and in order to continue to serve our customers as they have come to expect, we were forced to switch to a new order picking system,” explains Maarten Gratama, Operational Manager at BONFIX. “On the one hand, we were looking for more capacity, and on the other hand we were looking for an even more efficient way of order picking – also taking the shortage in the labour market into account.”

The company is also committed to handling orders error-free, often with extremely short lead times. To realise these ambitions, BONFIX sought a trustworthy partner to configure the optimal automated solution for its new facility.

“Vanderlande came in with a strong proposal, especially how to deal with our peaks between 1 and 5pm,” says Maarten. “In addition, we needed to ensure that a customer can make an order before the 5pm cut-off time and still receive it the next day.”

The BONFIX team was able to visit another Dutch company and see the FASTPICK system in action, with the automated storage and retrieval system (AS/RS) ADAPTO at its core. “It is amazing when you see it for the first time!” adds Maarten. “Due to everything I’ve learned at BONFIX, and my experience of the logistics process, we concluded very quickly that this was the system that suited us perfectly.”

According to Maarten, the company received great support from Vanderlande during the design phase. “That was quite an exciting moment for us, because it was all new,” he explains. “We had weekly contact with each other primarily to proactively identify potential issues and prevent them before they arose, ensuring a smoother process moving forward.”

To help everyone transition to advanced automation, Vanderlande ran a series of workshops to ensure key personnel understood how the system would work. The sessions also provided essential insights into data analysis and reporting to help BONFIX get the most out of the information generated by ADAPTO.

The warehouse that fits the system

During construction of the warehouse, Vanderlande liaised with the company to ensure essentials like heating and lighting were installed in the correct places. The whole approach was to fit the building to the automation – not the other way around.

The system features 34 ADAPTO shuttles that can reach 34 levels across six aisles and 21,352 storage locations. Three ergonomic goods-to-person (GtP) workstations have been installed, along with automated carton erecting, closing and labelling equipment.

Vanderlande provided sessions to introduce the system to the workforce, as well as training to help operators get to grips with the workstations. In addition, control room training was provided, along with a “jam-busting” module to keep the shuttles running smoothly and make resetting the system as easy as possible.

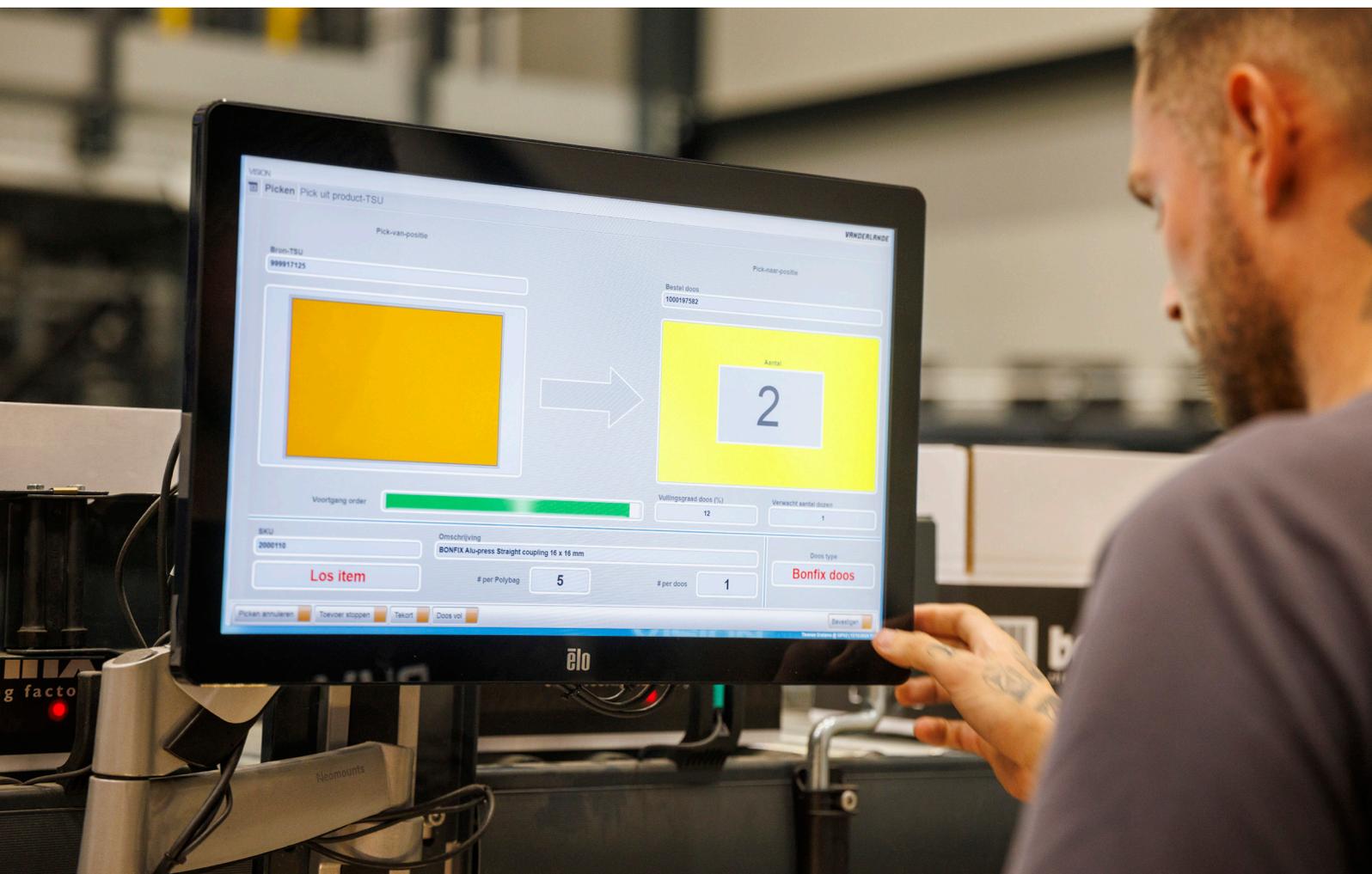
“The training was an opportunity for some employees to upskill,” adds Maarten. “They were inspired by the new system.”

Support through installation

“The Vanderlande site manager and a number of engineers were here during testing and helped us understand the process,” says Wil Henri Bastiaannet, Process Supervisor at BONFIX. “They showed us how to raise a ticket to flag up an issue before analysing and solving problems together.”

That level of service has continued since the system went live in 2023. “The support we receive is excellent and we have access to Vanderlande’s service desk, as well as engineers and software specialists,” adds Wil Henri. “It’s good to know there’s someone behind you who you can count on.”

The main reason for installing FASTPICK was to help BONFIX grow and increase capacity, and the system has significantly increased the number of daily orders the company can process.



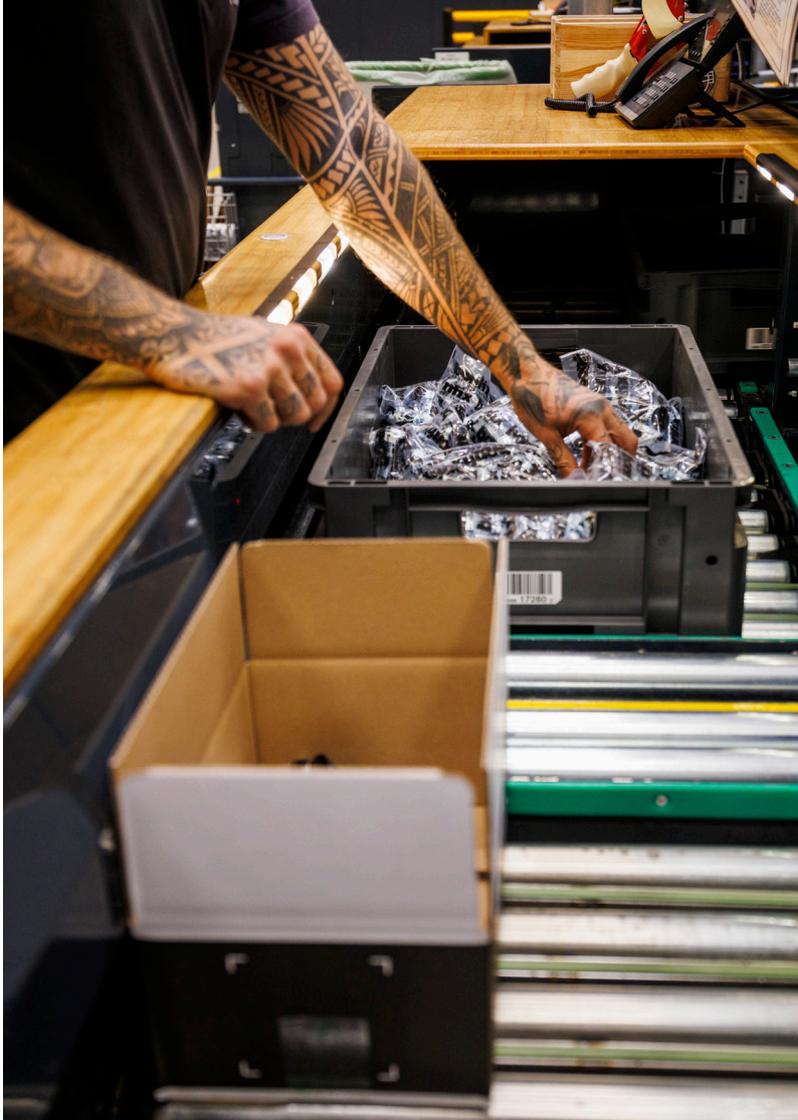


Giving wholesalers what they want

One of BONFIX's business goals is to treat every customer with equal importance, and that means looking after small wholesalers as well as the larger ones.

"It doesn't matter about the size and value of the order, they are the same as far as I am concerned," explains Marcel. "The world is changing and that's why we decided to buy ADAPTO – to be faster. We also bought it for efficiency, and there are already fewer errors with this system and less manual work."

"Another benefit is that our wholesale customers can now carry less stock, because our deliveries are fast and reliable – that's a huge advantage," adds Maarten. "FASTPICK provides rapid order fulfilment and individual item picking during peak times, which is what our customers demand. They can now order individual pieces, rather than purchasing a full box."



A better working environment

It's not only customers who are benefiting from the new system, as BONFIX employees also like it for a number of reasons. "Before the system went live, overtime was normal, which some employees didn't like," says Maarten. "But now everyone can go home on time."

Moreover, the benefits go beyond for the BONFIX workforce. The days of walking through the warehouse with a manual scanner are gone. The new automation has freed up people to carry out a variety of tasks throughout the day including order picking, shipment and replenishment.

"Process improvement ensures that I can create a better and more pleasant working environment for all of our employees," says Wil Henri. "The system has transformed their jobs because they have acquired new skills, and they have to work with the automation to keep things running smoothly."

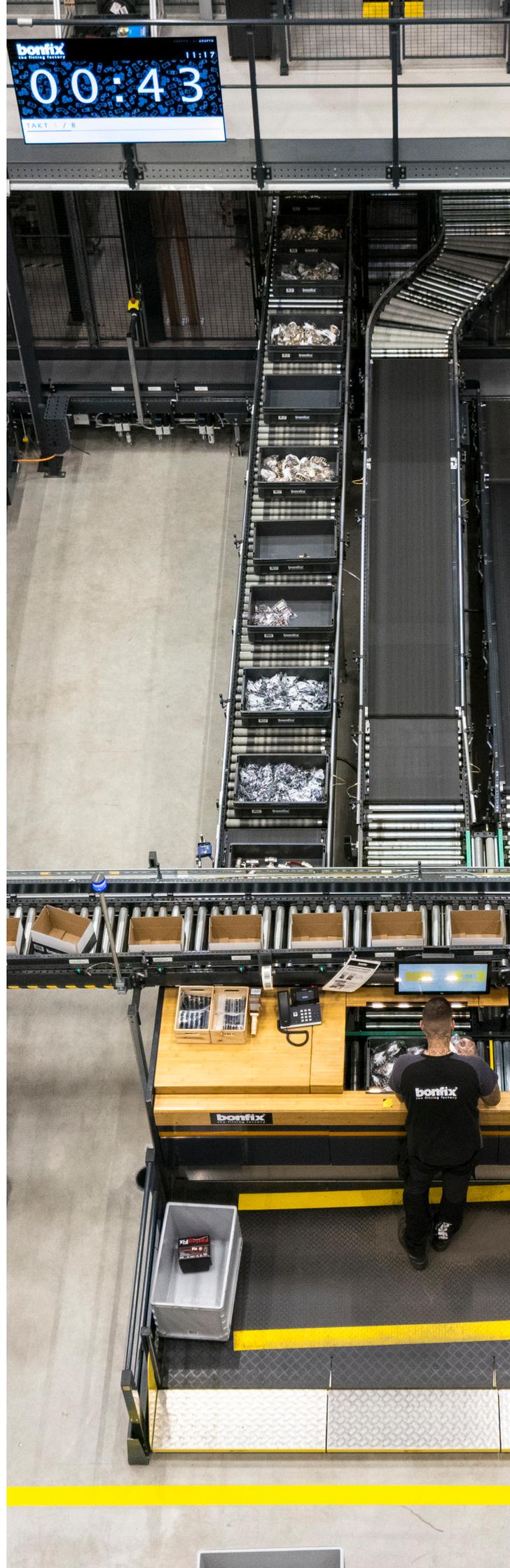
"After breaks, each member of staff restarts with a different task every two hours," adds Maarten. "This reduces the chance of mistakes because people are fresher. Our order error rate is only 0.07% now that we have ADAPTO – so that's 99.93% perfect and delivered within 24 hours, which is fantastic!"

Pride and partnership

Marcel is so proud of the new warehouse and the Vanderlande system that he also sees them as marketing tools for BONFIX. “If I am calling our customers, I invite them to visit, but tell them they will need to bring oxygen with them, because I will have to carry them back to their car,” he says. “We keep an impressive warehouse, because if a wholesaler or a plumber visit, it’s important they know they are doing business with the best.”

“The most beautiful moment comes when you ‘press the button’ for ADAPTO to start in the morning and the lights come on and everything begins moving,” says Wil Henri. “Moreover, we have a good working relationship with Vanderlande, and feel that their people are an extension of our team. It’s more like a collaboration: we work together to improve and make adjustments – like sparring partners!”

“Yes, we trust Vanderlande – they are so easy to work with!” adds Marcel with the final word. “The collaboration is excellent – and I really do mean excellent – because of the extensive expertise they have in all areas.”





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