



The Chase for Space

Trade shows highlight new equipment, stronger lifts and the latest electronics, which are generally far more interesting than mundane matters of space utilization. But by improving their use of existing warehouse space, many companies can reduce costs and increase efficiency considerably.

A physical increase in warehouse space is available from three sources: higher stacks, closer aisles and deeper shelves.

High Space Is Cheap Space

Are you using the upper atmosphere? The lowest-cost space you've got is close to the ceiling. (Two feet of added height increases square-foot costs a little, but lowers cubic-foot price more.) To get at it, you may need to change something — new forklift masts, stronger racks, different packaging. But efficiency gains from this new space often outweigh such costs.

Alternatively, consider a mezzanine. Unlike full stories, mezzanine levels are accessible by lift truck, with no need for an elevator. And you'll save on sprinkler systems.

Miles of Aisles?

Aisle width must, at a minimum, equal lift-truck turning radius, and handling attachments increase that minimum. All else being equal, a standing lift reduces aisle width requirements by a third, and a wire-guided turret lift by more than half. The latter offers greater flexibility with a "man-aboard" design.

How Deep Is Too Deep?

A two- or three-deep stacking system can reclaim aisle space in a warehouse. A crowded facility may result in some items being blocked, but staff can be trained to overcome this problem. Or to increase density temporarily, use moveable racks.

Don't leave space utilization up to chance, an architect's whim or the labor-saving instincts of a lift driver. Appoint a space planner who knows warehousing — and your warehouse.