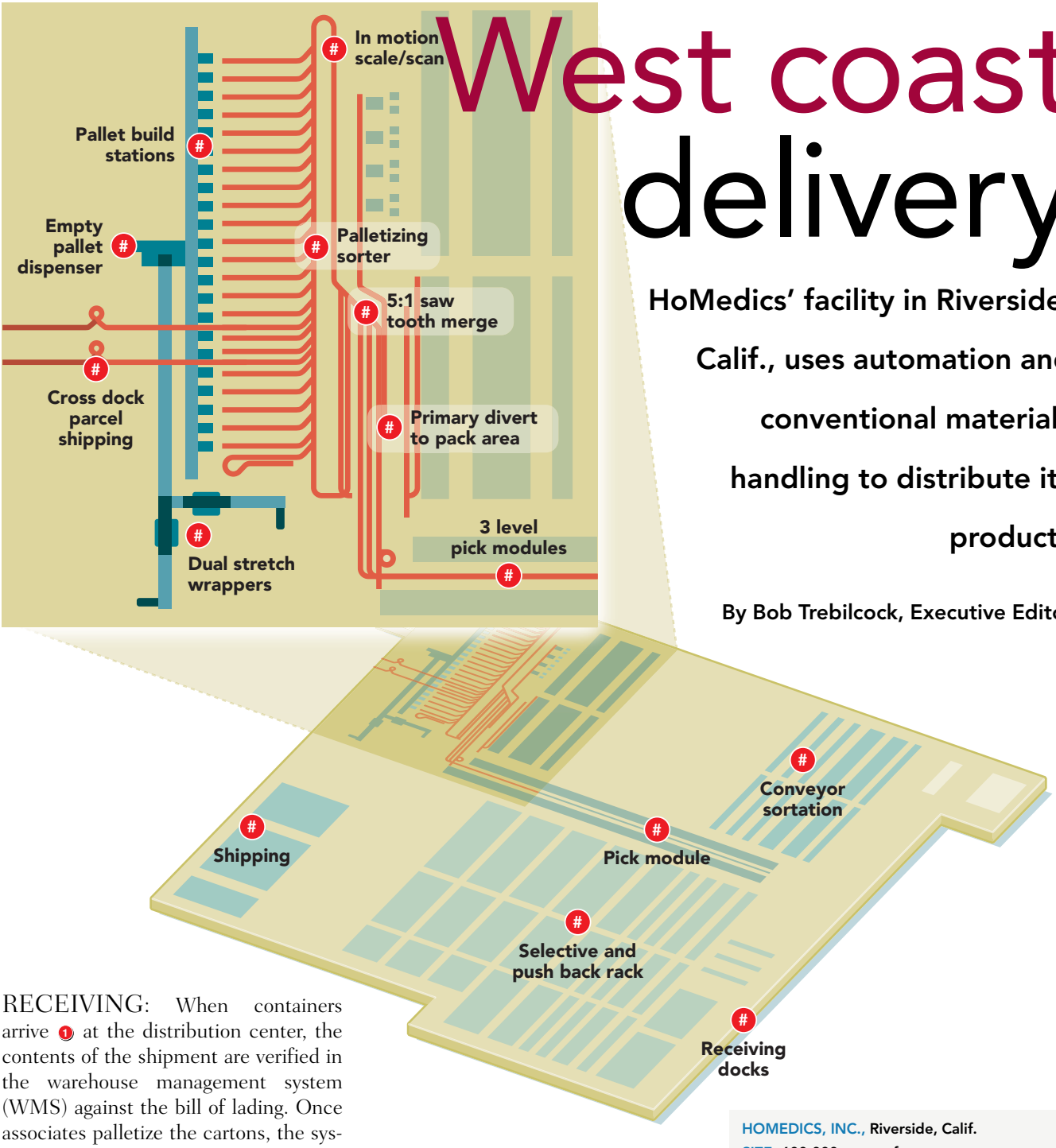
West coast delivery

HoMedics' facility in Riverside, Calif., uses automation and conventional materials handling to distribute its products

By Bob Trebilcock, Executive Editor



RECEIVING: When containers arrive ❶ at the distribution center, the contents of the shipment are verified in the warehouse management system (WMS) against the bill of lading. Once associates palletize the cartons, the system creates a license plate bar code label that will be used to track the pallet.

Putaway: While the WMS can do directed putaway, HoMedics allows its lift truck operators to choose storage locations. Fast-moving items are placed in floor locations ❷; cartons required for a partial- or mixed-pallet order are used to replenish pick locations in the three-level pick modules ❸. The remaining pallets are delivered two at a time by a pallet jack to a drop-off location in a reserve storage area ❹ with selective and push-back pallet rack. A reach truck is used in the reserve storage area to

HOMEDICS, INC., Riverside, Calif.
SIZE: 600,000 square feet
PRODUCTS: Home personal care products
SKUS: Currently handling 523 HoMedics-brand SKUs and 818 Taylor-brand SKUs
SHIFTS: 5 days, 1 shift
EMPLOYEES: 100
THROUGHPUT: 2 million cases per year to retail customers

Illustration by daniel Guidera

complete the putaway. Once the reach truck driver scans the storage location, pallets are available for order fulfillment.

Pick and pack: The WMS releases orders to the warehouse in waves and generates tasks based on the size of the order. The system can direct full-pallet picking, case picking and piece picking.

Pallets: A lift truck driver is directed to a storage location in the reserve storage area 4. When the driver pulls and scans the pallet, the system generates a bar code label for shipping. The driver applies the label and then drops the pallet off at the stretch wrap station 5, where it is automatically wrapped for shipment 6.

Case picking: Labels for cartons are printed for associates in the pick module area 3. Once a carton is picked from a storage location, it is labeled and put on a takeaway conveyor 7 in the pick module. The cartons are automatically scanned, diverted 8 to the pack area conveyor and then sorted 9 to one of 22 pallet build stations 10 where everything associated with that order is palletized. Once a pallet is built, an associate presses a call button. A transfer vehicle picks up an empty pallet from a pallet dispenser 11 and then travels to the pallet build station 10. The associate pushes the full pallet onto the transfer vehicle and then pulls off the empty pallet to build the next pallet. The transfer vehicle then delivers the full pallet to the stretch wrap area 5, where it is automatically wrapped for shipment 6.

Piece picking: Labels for piece picking are also printed in the pick module area 3. For these orders, an associate picks items to a tote, and then places the tote on the takeaway conveyor system 7. The conveyor delivers it to a packing lane, where an associate places the items in a shipping container. Once packed, the container is labeled and placed on a conveyor. The container is automatically scanned and weighed on an inline scale 12. Once the order has been verified, it is diverted to a cross-dock conveyor 13 that delivers it to a parcel shipping area 6.

Shipping: Once full or mixed pallets are stretched wrapped 5, they are staged in the shipping area 6 to await the scheduled arrival of a carrier. When the trailer for that order arrives, the pallets are loaded onto the trailer and the