



THE FOOD, ALCOHOL & TOBACCO PERFORMANCE CHALLENGE

HOW SMARTER MATERIAL HANDLING PROTECTS THROUGHPUT,
PRODUCT INTEGRITY, UPTIME, AND LABOR PRODUCTIVITY



Food, alcohol, and tobacco warehouse operations often depend on application-specific equipment, strong uptime, and consistent operator productivity.

PREPARED FOR
Food, alcohol, and tobacco
operations leaders

FOCUS
Throughput, uptime, product
integrity, labor productivity

PREPARED BY
Wolter

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Food, alcohol, and tobacco operations run inside demanding environments where service commitments, labor pressure, product integrity, sanitation standards, and cost discipline all converge. Whether the facility supports packaged food, beverage, tobacco, cold storage, or mixed consumer goods, performance is often won or lost in the daily flow of pallets, cases, operators, docks, and equipment.

Material handling equipment is often treated as a tactical asset. In these operations, it is better understood as part of the operating system. The

right equipment mix, service strategy, freezer or dock application fit, fleet visibility, and rental flexibility can directly influence throughput, uptime, product handling, operator productivity, and customer performance.

This white paper gives operations and supply chain leaders a practical framework for evaluating whether their current material handling strategy is helping or holding back performance.

01

Throughput

Reduce bottlenecks in receiving, staging, replenishment, picking, and shipping.

02

Uptime

Protect daily execution with better service, PM discipline, and fleet planning.

03

Product integrity

Reduce damage, preserve handling quality, and support safer product movement.

04

Visibility

Use data to understand utilization, maintenance, impacts, and operator behavior.

Why this matters now

- Shelf-life pressure, traceability, and customer commitments increase the cost of delay or disruption.
- Cold rooms, docks, high-velocity pick zones, and mixed-SKU storage create application-specific material handling demands.
- Labor availability, safety, equipment downtime, and sanitation discipline remain daily operating pressures inside the warehouse.

KEY POINT

For food, alcohol, and tobacco operations, material handling is not simply a line item. It is one of the daily execution levers that determines whether throughput, product integrity, and customer commitments are protected.

1. THE NEW OPERATING REALITY FOR FOOD, ALCOHOL, AND TOBACCO OPERATIONS

Food, alcohol, and tobacco operations are under pressure to move product safely, consistently, and cost-effectively across receiving, storage, production support, picking, and shipping. Many facilities also manage cold environments, demanding sanitation standards, packaging complexity, promotional volume swings, or customer-specific service expectations.

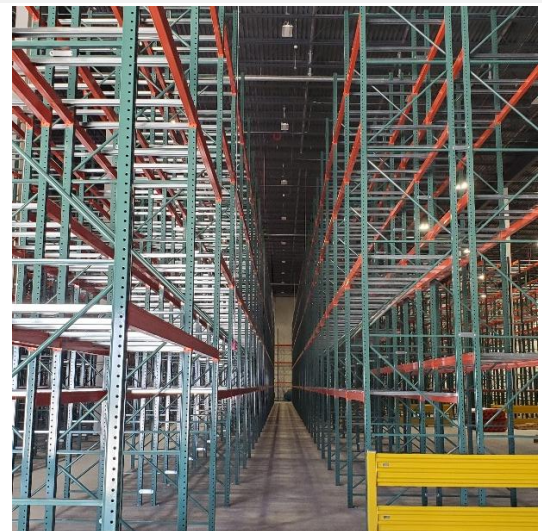
That operating reality changes the role of the warehouse floor. Every dock door, pallet position, aisle, lift truck, battery, maintenance plan, operator assignment, and staging location contributes to the performance the customer experiences.

The pressures shaping food, alcohol, and tobacco operations

- Throughput pressure tied to service levels, production support, and customer fill expectations
- Temperature-zone constraints, sanitation requirements, and product-handling discipline
- Labor shortages, overtime pressure, and operator retention challenges
- Rising facility costs and pressure to use every cubic foot well
- Compliance, traceability, and quality expectations that can put customer relationships at risk
- Margin pressure that requires better use of every asset

EXECUTIVE IMPLICATION

The question is not whether these operations have forklifts. The question is whether the fleet, service model, environment fit, and operator support system are aligned to the work the business is being paid to perform.



Cold rooms, staging zones, docks, and high-velocity aisles are often where material handling performance becomes visible: throughput, uptime, safety, and product handling intersect.

2. WHY MATERIAL HANDLING STRATEGY MATTERS MORE THAN EVER

In fast-moving food, alcohol, and tobacco environments, small inefficiencies repeat hundreds or thousands of times per week. A travel path that is too long, a truck that is underspecified, a freezer application that shortens productive operator time, or a recurring maintenance issue can quietly erode performance.

Performance levers

Throughput: Move more product with fewer bottlenecks and interruptions.

Uptime: Reduce unplanned disruption from equipment downtime.

Labor productivity: Help operators work efficiently and consistently, even in demanding environments.

Product integrity: Reduce product damage, rough handling, and avoidable rework.

Safety: Improve visibility, awareness, training, and operating discipline.

Material handling decisions

Equipment mix: Counterbalance trucks, reach trucks, pallet jacks, low-level order selection, freezer-ready configurations, and rentals.

Service model: Planned maintenance, emergency support, parts availability, and technician responsiveness.

Fleet data: Utilization, maintenance history, impacts, operator behavior, and shift-level strain.

Environment fit: Cold storage, dock work, floor condition, load type, and sanitation requirements.

Energy strategy: Battery, charging, fuel, shift patterns, and power availability.



Application-specific equipment choices matter in cold rooms, docks, and fast-moving warehouse aisles where uptime and operator productivity drive daily performance.

3. FIVE MATERIAL HANDLING QUESTIONS EVERY FOOD, ALCOHOL, AND TOBACCO LEADER SHOULD ASK



Are we using the right equipment for each environment?

A lift truck that works in one application may create waste, safety risk, operator fatigue, or product damage in another. Temperature, floor conditions, aisle width, rack height, travel distance, load type, sanitation needs, and shift intensity should guide equipment selection.



Where are we losing time between receiving, storage, picking, and shipping?

Look for congestion at docks, staging areas, freezer entries, charging zones, high-velocity aisles, and locations where operators regularly wait for equipment or product.



How much downtime or cold-zone disruption are we tolerating?

Unplanned downtime creates more than a repair cost. It disrupts labor planning, slows product flow, increases overtime, and can threaten service commitments. In cold environments, operator exposure and battery or fuel strategy matter too.



Are we protecting operator productivity and product integrity?

Equipment choice influences visibility, comfort, handling control, and operator endurance. In the wrong application, the operation may pay for slower work, more damage, and shorter productive time.



Is our equipment strategy keeping up with volume, SKU, and compliance demands?

Customer demands change. New accounts, packaging shifts, higher throughput, greater traceability expectations, and tighter shipping windows may require a different fleet strategy than what worked several years ago.

Question for your consideration:

Would a 30-minute material handling review reveal hidden bottlenecks, downtime exposure, cold-zone constraints, or fleet utilization opportunities inside your operation?

4. PRACTICAL IMPROVEMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD, ALCOHOL, AND TOBACCO OPERATIONS

The following framework can help an operations leader connect daily warehouse pressure points to material handling improvement opportunities.

Industry Pressure Point	Operational Impact	Material Handling Opportunity
Cold storage or temperature-zone exposure	Shorter productive operator time, slower throughput, more shift interruption	Freezer-ready equipment, cabs, heated seats, zone-specific fleet planning, and energy strategy
Sanitation and product-handling standards	Washdown disruption, misuse, contamination concerns, and inconsistent handling	Application-fit equipment, disciplined PM, operator routines, and easier-to-support fleet configurations
Seasonal volume swings and promotions	Short-term surges, dock congestion, and unbalanced capacity	Rental strategy, temporary equipment, flexible service support, and better planning cadence
SKU complexity and packaging variation	More touches, slower picks, and product damage risk	Right-sized trucks, better attachment/application fit, aisle and staging optimization
Equipment downtime	Missed shipments, labor disruption, overtime, and service risk	Planned maintenance, parts readiness, technician responsiveness, and utilization review
Labor availability and retention	Overtime, fatigue, and inconsistent execution	Ergonomic equipment, operator comfort, training, and simplified workflows
Compliance and traceability expectations	Audit pressure, disruption, and customer risk	Better data, operator discipline, maintenance records, and telematics-supported visibility

A practical starting point

For many operations, the best first step is not a large capital decision. It is a structured operational review: what equipment is being used, where it is being used, how often it is down, how well it fits the application, and what data is available to guide better decisions.



Fleet visibility can help turn maintenance, utilization, and operator activity into management information.

5. TECHNOLOGY, AUTOMATION, AND DATA: A PRACTICAL MATURITY PATH

Food, alcohol, and tobacco leaders are watching automation, robotics, connected equipment, and data tools closely. The right answer is not the same for every facility. The more useful question is: what level of technology adoption creates a measurable operational return while protecting uptime and product flow?

A practical maturity path starts with visibility and discipline before moving into more complex automation. Data quality, maintenance discipline, operator training, and consistent processes create the foundation for smarter equipment and technology decisions.

1	2	3	4
Stabilize	Measure	Optimize	Automate selectively
PM discipline, uptime focus, safety training, right-sized equipment	Utilization data, maintenance reporting, operator behavior, impacts, and environment strain	Fleet rationalization, energy strategy, layout review, rental planning	Telematics, automation, robotics, and workflow tools where ROI is clear

Technology should answer operating questions

- Which equipment is overused, underused, or mismatched to the application?
- Where are impacts, damage, or unsafe behaviors most likely to occur?
- Which maintenance issues repeat and what can be prevented?
- Which zone, shift, dock, or aisle creates the highest performance strain?
- Where could automation, rental capacity, layout changes, or freezer-specific upgrades deliver the clearest return?

IMPORTANT PERSPECTIVE

Technology creates value when it improves decision quality. The best fleet strategy combines equipment, service, data, operator training, and operational discipline.



6. HOW WOLTER HELPS FOOD, ALCOHOL, AND TOBACCO LEADERS IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

Wolter works with warehouse, distribution, and operations leaders to help align material handling equipment, service support, rental strategy, parts availability, training, and fleet planning with the realities of demanding environments. For food, alcohol, and tobacco operations, the goal is simple: keep product moving, keep operators safe, reduce avoidable downtime, and support consistent execution across the building.

Areas where Wolter can support these operations

- New and used forklifts, reach trucks, pallet jacks, order pickers, and warehouse equipment
- Linde material handling solutions where precision, ergonomics, environment fit, and operator productivity are critical
- Bobcat forklifts and warehouse equipment for durable, versatile material handling applications
- Big Joe integrated lithium-ion forklifts, pallet trucks, and warehouse equipment with onboard charging options for flexible warehouse applications
- Planned maintenance, emergency service, parts support, and uptime-focused fleet care
- Rental equipment and flexible capacity planning for seasonal peaks, special projects, or short-term needs
- Operator training, safety support, fleet consultation, and equipment application review
- Telematics, fleet visibility, industrial storage and handling, and automation or robotics conversations that improve operating insight

**Is your current material handling strategy helping or holding back productivity in your food, alcohol, or tobacco operation?
Schedule a 30-minute Material Handling Review with Wolter.**

Review fleet fit, environment demands, downtime exposure, service strategy, rental needs, and improvement opportunities.