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iForce despatches good retail news

Figures for 2011 announced by leading e-fulfilment and returns logistics business iForce buck the bad news trend in retail. Furthermore, they provide some positive news for the high street.

iForce has announced another highly successful year, continuing its strong growth path as the company continues to lead the way in providing online retail fulfilment (known as e-fulfilment) and returns processing for its clients. It also provides encouraging news for the high street because of the 6.2 million orders despatched by iForce throughout 2011 (a 4 per cent increase on 2010), some 2 million were 'collect from store' orders - that's 38 per cent higher than last year, indicating that online retail can also increase footfall in the high street store.

"This year saw increased emphasis and focus on stock availability and customer convenience as can be seen from the 38% increase in collect from store orders being handled," said Mark Hewitt, CEO of iForce.

During the Christmas peak's busiest week (the week beginning Monday 14 December 2011), iForce despatched 317,000 orders (a 4 per cent increase on 2010), which comprised 1.1 million items.

The busiest day of the entire Christmas peak period (1 October to 31 December) was actually Boxing Day, unlike 2010 when 7 December saw the most online shopping activity. "The fact that more orders were received on Boxing Day than any other day in the year shows that people are looking and waiting for what they see as a keen offer or real bargain," reports Mark Hewitt.

"In relation to Christmas trading, peak activity came later than in 2010 and when it arrived it was bigger and more challenging over a shorter period. Some of our facilities saw a tenfold increase in activities when compared to outside-peak levels," he added.

"As a result, iForce colleague numbers rose from our usual 600 to over 2,000 through the close partnerships we have established with agency providers. It is at times like these when the investment you make in your people, training, processes and systems pays off and I am pleased at how the teams at each of our sites responded to the demands of our clients with diligence and professionalism. This ensured that all Service Level Agreements were met, all budgets beaten and all client expectations exceeded."

This has been endorsed by iForce's clients. Phil Courtney, General Manager Multi Channel Fulfilment at John Lewis said: "iForce have fulfilled a significant proportion of our One-man online fulfilment during this peak and clearance period, have achieved service levels better than targeted and managed their cost base effectively throughout."



Adrian Spence, Head of e-commerce at Paperchase added: "iForce coped well with our increase in volume over peak, providing a high level of service throughout their operation. They worked closely with us to ensure that customer promises were met and feedback has been positive. We are very satisfied with the service received."

Dave Thornton, Product and Trading Manager, Waitrose Wine Direct said: "Our forecasted volumes were despatched on time and on budget; also, iForce were able to scale up at short notice and despatch significant additional volume in the final week up to Christmas when our trade came in later than anticipated."

Mark Hewitt concluded: "2011 has been a solid year for iForce and one in which we once more bucked the overall general retail trends. A global 7% increase in like-for-like item throughput shows good progress as a business and again demonstrates our clear ability to respond to the needs of our clients, some of whom recorded throughput increases of 20%.

"Clients' New Year sales have started strongly and order volumes arrived a few days earlier than in 2010. This bodes well for our coming year and we continue to expect real terms growth in our numbers. Our returns processing peak is underway and already the early signs are that this will see a record level of activity at our sites providing reverse logistics solutions for our clients."



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