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Often a significant part of expenditure for canmaking and filling businesses, the supply chain and logistics areas offer substantial cost savings if made more efficient.

This is where US-based Corbi Plastics claims to offer a cost advantage over traditional wood and paper pallets, or dunnage, with its reusable plastics pallets and sheets, used either on a stand alone basis or through the firm's pooling system.

Corbi was established as its own entity in 2005, combining expertise in plastics manufacturing and logistics management to provide the filling and packaging industries with a "more efficient material and method of moving material through the supply chain".

The company takes its experience from three parents: Cartonplast, Karton SPA and Orbis Corporation, with a strong initial presence in the canmaking industry.

"Prior to the joint venture, Orbis Corporation already manufactured most plastic sheets for can logistics," explains Jack Graham, president of Corbi Plastics.

Plastics dunnage is an alternative to wood and paper, which, as organic materials, are said to provide a breeding ground for the growth and potential spread of bacteria and mould.

"The typical lifespan of our product is up to 200 uses, compared to around 10 uses for paper or wood. This technology is already widely used in Europe, and we're bringing it to the US market with our extensive, national network," explains Graham.

"For canmakers, Corbi supplies accurate packaging quantities when and where they are needed to lower cost structures, improve asset utilization and offer greater operational consistency."

For fillers, it manages stock balances and arranges stock pick-ups so that brand owners receive and deliver secured and undamaged food and beverage containers.

"Our plastics dunnage allows consistent sanitary transport materials to better protect food and beverage containers, and

Cost cutters



Pallet and sheet specialist Corbi Plastics is bringing European-style supply chain solutions to the US canmaking and filling market. Tom Woerndl reports



Plastics packs punch: Jack Graham (left), president of Corbi Plastics, and Roy Hasenfratz, director of pooling, say that plastics pallets offer significant cost advantages for canmakers and fillers



Europe, and we are implementing it in the US."

It's not just fillers that are recognising the benefits Corbi's plastics dunnage has to offer. The company already boasts a comprehensive management programme for Rexam in the US, including 58 million sheet trips and 2.8 million frame and pallet trips per year.

Corbi began managing services for the canmaker in February 2006 in Chicago and St Paul and completed full conversion of all Rexam plants to Corbi's fully-managed system in March of 2007.

"To better serve Rexam, we established a presence nearby each Rexam plant to service all of their reusable packaging needs," notes Hasenfratz. "We're getting more packaging manufacturers into the mix, and are currently talking with several of them to analyse their cost structure."

Also in January this year, Corbi announced an agreement with DS Container to join its dunnage management pool next month.

"They will inject annual volumes of 125,000 pallets and 125,000 top frames and will share all dunnage with the Corbi pool," explains Graham. "The switch to plastics divider sheets in mid-2009 will further reduce their dunnage cost structure."

Currently, DS Container uses 60 per cent plastics pallets, and 40 per cent wood. Corbi Plastics LLC, 609 Burton Blvd, DeForest, Wisconsin 53532, USA. Tel: 1 608 846 2422. Fax: 1 608 846 7702. Web: www.corbiplastics.com

keep filler warehouses free from contaminants," explains Roy Hasenfratz, director of pooling.

"We have 13 service centres strategically located in the US to improve logistics for our dunnage pool and cut travel distances as dunnage passes from container manufacturer to filler and back again."

Pooling is offered by Corbi as a gradual way of entering the 'plastics' supply chain, with companies signing up to a share system of secondary packaging.

The alternative for fillers is to invest a significant outlay on converting existing wooden pallets to plastics. While Hasenfratz says this will yield substantial cost benefits, he realises that many companies prefer the incremental pooling route.

Key fillers already using Corbi's plastics dunnage include top US brewer Anheuser-Busch InBev, which employs the technology for all of its unfilled glass bottles.

"We are expanding this deal to more can businesses as well," says Hasenfratz. "This combined glass and can management system is already being used in