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Digitalization as a driver of efficiency

Samsonite

The European Distribution Centre (EDC) in Oudenaarde forms the beating heart of Samsonite Europe's logistics operations. Every year, millions of suitcases, backpacks, and accessories pass through its doors, destined for consumers and retail partners across the continent. The complexity of this logistics network brought with it a familiar challenge: workforce planning had become unsustainable.

Warehouse Manager Nick Van Eetvelde describes it as his dream to run operations without relying on Excel.

Samsonite Europe opts for smart workforce planning

Samsonite's European Distribution Centre in Oudenaarde processes an average of thirty containers of bulky goods every day, spread across five internal warehouses and two external sites. A total of 180 employees work there in three shifts. Their responsibilities vary widely — from unloading containers and internal transport to maintenance, picking, packing, and shipping goods. On top of that, customers are increasingly requesting personalized luggage, adding another layer of complexity to operations.

Until September 2024, workforce planning was done entirely by hand in Excel. "A very error-prone way of working," says Nick Van Eetvelde, Warehouse Manager at the EDC. "It led to a lot of ad hoc communication between team leaders, HR, and staffing agencies." Planning temporary workers and students was particularly challenging. "It often happened that team leaders didn't know who would actually show up at the start of a shift. Students and temporary staff would report to reception without knowing where to go. It caused frustration and wasted time."



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Skills, Rotation, and Volume-Based Planning

What solution could bring structure to this chaos? The choice fell on Solutio, the workforce planning platform from Go-Virtual. "We were mainly looking for a partner that already offered a solid solution, but was willing to adapt to our needs and provide customization," explains Nick Van Eetvelde. Solutio provides automated planning that takes not only absences into account but also employees' skill levels, availability, and rotation preferences.

"All employees — including temporary workers — receive a digital profile during onboarding, which records their competencies, certain certifications, and department-specific skills," the warehouse manager continues. "Skills might include operating a forklift, working in a specific warehouse, or experience with personalization. The software distinguishes between core skills and supplementary skills, using this hierarchy to assign people to the right tasks."

Efficient and simple rotation was a particularly important criterion. Previously, planners manually tracked who worked where and when. Solutio now automates rotation based on predefined preferences and rotation plans. "We strongly believe in polyvalence and want to avoid having people stay in the same role for years. Now we can organize this automatically and transparently."

Nick Van Eetvelde points out that around 200 different students work at the EDC over the course of a year. "In the past, we had little overview of which student had

worked on which task or operation in a given year. Now we can easily refer to the history: the system records exactly which warehouse a student has worked in and which competencies they have developed. This gives us a much clearer picture and allows us to assign people more effectively or provide them with the right training."

AI as a Driver of Predictability and Optimization

The next step is to base planning not only on personnel data but also on the expected workload. "Currently, we manually enter how many people we think are needed per zone, but we want to evolve toward a system where the software predicts the number of employees required for the planned workload, both inbound and outbound," says Nick Van Eetvelde.

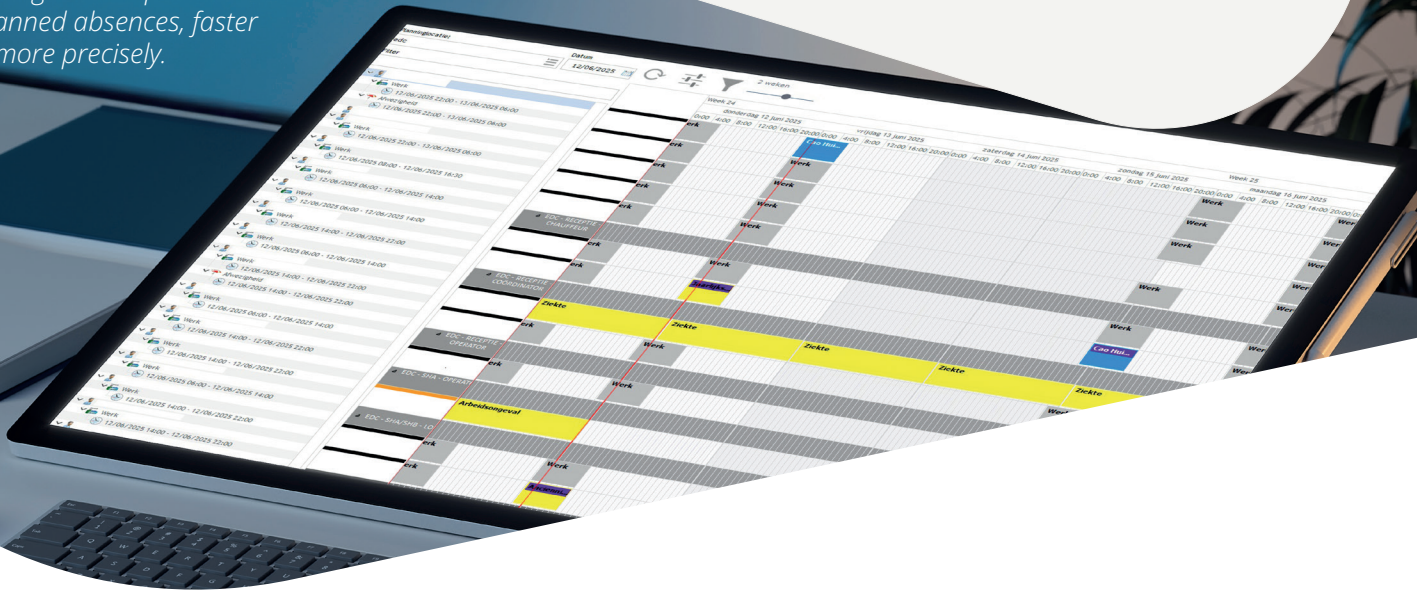
The software includes AI functionality to support this. For example, if 600 suitcases require personalized inscriptions, the software will eventually estimate how many employees are needed, what skills they require, and how best to distribute them across shifts. Dynamic rescheduling allows the team to respond to deviations, such as peaks or unexpected absences, more quickly and accurately.

"Our goal is to move toward a system in which the software can automatically predict the number of employees required for the planned workload."



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Dynamic rescheduling allows Samsonite to handle fluctuations, including sudden peaks or unplanned absences, faster and more precisely.



Solutio also helps reduce human errors. "In Excel, it sometimes happened that someone was accidentally scheduled twice, or assigned to a task they were not authorized to perform. Now the system ensures these mistakes no longer occur." The combination of self-learning capabilities, skills-based planning, and integration with real-time data makes the solution more advanced than a traditional planning package. For Samsonite, the software acts as an intelligent decision-making tool, enabling flexible, accurate, and forward-looking operations.

Implementation Driven by the Workforce

According to Nick Van Eetvelde, implementing Solutio went relatively quickly and without major issues. "Six months after the decision, we went live with the basic version. The real key to success was our key user, Evelien Van de Velde, who drove the project from start to finish." Samsonite specifically brought her on board for her IT background. She served as the bridge between operations and developers, collecting feedback from the floor, guiding the rollout, and providing explanations to team leaders.

"We launched the basic version six months after the decision, and it went smoothly."

After three months, Nick's team gathered updates and improvement points to address collectively, ensuring ongoing changes would not compromise system

stability. He praises the communication with the software provider: "No clunky helpdesk, just direct lines to people who understood our context and operations. That really made a difference."

Transparency and Peace of Mind

The greatest benefit, according to Nick Van Eetvelde, lies in the calm and clarity the system provides. Team leaders can log in and immediately see who is available, where there are absences, and who is scheduled. Thanks to a direct link with the time-tracking system, it's visible in real time who has actually clocked in. On the shop floor, a screen shows each employee where they need to be. "Previously, people queued in the morning to ask where they should work. Now they see it immediately. No more double-booked employees or unmanned departments. It sounds obvious, but it's a world of difference when you consider where we came from."

Integration with the HR platform has also greatly improved collaboration with staffing agencies. Everyone works with the same up-to-date data, as requests now go directly through Solutio. "Previously, we were sending emails late into the evening with updates, and not everyone received the information on time. Today, that's unnecessary," explains Van Eetvelde. In the future, a feature will allow employees to receive SMS notifications telling them which department or task they are assigned to the next day.



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Focus on Core Tasks

Digitalization translates into fewer errors, less frustration, and more time for what truly matters: the logistics operations themselves. "The system handles administrative work, so team leaders can focus on managing their people and ensuring quality." For operators, daily routines have changed little: leave requests still go through the familiar time-tracking system. What has changed is predictability and clarity: "Everyone knows faster and more accurately where they need to be and what task they are performing."

An additional advantage is that leave requests are now linked to capacity groups. "We've set it so that no more than a third of the staff can take leave at the same time, but distributed evenly across different functions," says Van Eetvelde. "This prevents situations where, for example, all forklift drivers are absent simultaneously."

From Planning to Maintenance

Samsonite Europe's ambition in digital transformation is further demonstrated by plans to integrate production and assembly departments into Solutio later this year. All planning activities will then take place on a single platform. "These departments still plan on paper today but want to join this digital solution," notes Van Eetvelde.

Additionally, an extra module for maintenance tracking is part of future plans. "Technicians could scan a machine with a handheld device, log their work, and build a digital history. The module is standard in Solutio, but we're not using it yet. Again, no Excel or paper — just structured data you can rely on." Solutio is gradually evolving into a central hub for operations. Van Eetvelde emphasizes that functionality must remain the priority: "We digitalize with a purpose. Not because we have to, but because it helps us work better, more accurately, and more efficiently."

Lessons for the Industry

What advice does Nick Van Eetvelde have for other logistics players? "Start with a clear vision. For us, it was moving away from Excel toward transparency and automation. Next, find a partner who listens to your needs. And finally, ensure you have a key user who bridges operations and IT. I cannot stress enough how crucial Evelien Van de Velde was to the success of our digital transformation."

The benefits of this transformation are clear: "We make fewer mistakes, send fewer emails and hold fewer meetings, and start every day with a clear view of who is doing what. This brings peace of mind, which translates into better performance."

Source: Value Chain Management (oktober–november 2025).

**In the long term, AI-powered
planning will provide
overview, stability, and
accuracy in Samsonite's
logistics operations.**



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