

**CASE STUDY**

# Mainway Successfully Integrates Book Depot's Robotics System with Their Conveyor System



“The people at Mainway are attentive to our needs and have a genuine interest in solving problems for us. I really appreciate the level of service, support and advice that they offer.”

– Bill Van Vliet,  
CIO at Book Depot

## ABOUT

Book Depot is Canada's largest wholesaler and retailer of bargain books. Established in 1985, they operate out of their 400,000 square foot distribution facility in Thorold, Ontario. With a staff of over 200 employees, 90,000 titles and 12 million copies in stock that seems to grow daily, they use automated order fulfillment equipment to ensure orders are shipped to customers quickly and cost effectively.

## BUSINESS CHALLENGE

In 1997, Bill Van Vliet, the Chief Information Officer at Book Depot, successfully launched Book Depot's e-commerce sites, known as BookOutlet.com/ca and Bookdepot.com/ca. With his team he went on to develop a warehouse management system for inventory, order, sales and automation management, but Book Depot's rapid growth demanded a more efficient way to sort incoming inventory. Van Vliet then introduced a mechanical sorter to process their inbound product and he incorporated innovative technologies like conveyor routing and robotics to support the project.

Mainway was selected to provide the conveyor routing systems to connect all these components together, including the take-away conveyors from the mechanical sorter, additional zone diverts throughout the conveyor fulfillment system and a recirculation line to by-pass the shipping area and reduce the congestion in this area.

However, during phase III of this automation project, a third-party company that had been hired to work on the robotics system ran into a snag. They were on site to integrate two large robots designed to stack totes on pallets into the conveyor feed system – but they were short 10 feet of conveyor. These last 10 feet were crucial to interface the robotic cell into the system. To add to their challenges, their conveyor system was a different type to that of the main conveyor feed system, so their robotics couldn't be integrated. It was recognised that this was a challenge that Mainway could solve.

## BUSINESS SOLUTION

Book Depot had already been working with Mainway for several years and they appreciated the fact that Mainway operates as an integrator who is able to source solutions from various suppliers to ensure a successful installation - and not as a manufacturer. With this in mind, Book Depot enlisted Mainway to manage the conveyor part of the Phase III automation project.

Van Vliet comments, “We used Mainway to manage the project because they are able to look after everything. They brought together the electrical supplier, the mechanical installer and all of the other stakeholders and coordinated the activities of all the different partners to achieve the common goal of a successful installation.”

Mainway worked together with the third-party company to successfully integrate

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the two robots into the conveyor feed system. Notes Van Vliet, "Mainway was very tactful when working with the other company, and they solved the technical problems and got the system working. Mainway never mentioned the extra time. They just got the job done." He continues, "That's their specialty. That's what they do well and that's what I want. What I don't want is to go to a robotics company and a conveyor company and then try to piece it all together and try to make it work. That's why I use Mainway."

## BUSINESS RESULTS

Mainway brought the conveyor portion of Book Depot's phase III automation project to a successful completion on time and on budget. Van Vliet says, "Mainway is great at communicating, they excel at project management and they bring forward alternative suggestions, not because they want to make more money, but because they believe it is the right solution."

Mainway capitalizes on their knowledge of the material handling business and their understanding of the people that they work with, from mechanical engineers to electrical installers to programmers. Together they deliver material handling systems that work. "Their attention to detail in terms of the design is both innovative and precise. When they come on site they are hands-on, they look at your problem, and even though they may not have the answer straight away, they research options and come back with a viable solution," observes Van Vliet.

Going forward, Book Depot has already signed a contract with Mainway for another upcoming project. Van Vliet notes, "We're a company that doesn't really stand still for too long and we have already asked Mainway to quote on yet another large project for the future. Mainway is definitely the company that we will utilize for any type of material handling, logistics and conveyor solutions."

