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Exclusive

KULANI KINIS

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A word from our CEO

Where are we really heading?

While preparing this letter during a business trip in China, sitting in my 76th-floor hotel room and staring at the immensely impressive skyline of Chongqing — a cyberpunk city that feels as though it was taken straight out of a futuristic 2070 movie — I find my mind wandering into an existential zone, asking itself a simple yet difficult question: So, where are we really heading?

The ADHD side of my brain automatically begins exploring this question from multiple angles at once, combining it with the realities of today's world: population decline across both developed and developing nations, regional conflicts, political instability, economic uncertainty, tax and tariff wars, and rapidly shifting global dynamics.

Where are we heading as humanity? Where is the world of trade heading? And perhaps most importantly for us — where are we heading as Bleckmann?

The reply to the question of "Where are we heading as humanity?" is an entire book on its own which I won't get in to now, however, "How do we overcome the realities of today's challenges while remaining relevant, competitive, and significant in tomorrow's world as Bleckmann?" is something we should really focus on.

China has always impressed me with its scale, speed, and ability to reinvent itself. But what strikes me today is not only the infrastructure or the technology. It is the sheer magnitude of consumption.

Hundreds of millions of consumers moving faster, shopping faster, adapting faster, and expecting faster service than ever before. Entire ecosystems are being built around immediacy, convenience, personalization, and digital interaction.

The speed at which consumer behavior is evolving in this part of the world should serve as a wake-up call to every globally operating company — including ourselves as a service provider.

At Bleckmann, we have built a strong and impressive growth story over the years. We transformed ourselves from a traditional European fashion logistics company into a global, technology-driven lifestyle products supply chain partner. We invested heavily — and continue investing even more — into automation, robotics, AI-supported systems, and scalable fulfilment solutions because we understood early on that logistics would no longer simply be about moving boxes from point A to point B.

The future of logistics is intelligence. Automation is no longer a luxury or a differentiator. It is rapidly becoming the minimum requirement to remain competitive. AI is not something arriving "one day in the future." It is already reshaping forecasting, inventory planning, warehouse productivity, customer service, transport optimization, and even strategic decision-making itself. Companies that fail to adapt to this transformation will slowly become irrelevant.

What excites me is that Bleckmann is not standing still while this transformation takes place. We are actively positioning ourselves at the center of it. But technology alone is never enough. Technology without culture, speed, courage, and execution remains nothing more than expensive machinery.

What will continue to define Bleckmann is our mindset. The reality is that customer expectations are changing globally at a pace we have never witnessed before. Realistically, we may never become "Chinese fast," but we certainly cannot afford to remain "European slow" either. The brands of tomorrow will not only expect logistics partners capable of flawless execution.

They will expect partners who can think strategically, innovate continuously, adapt rapidly, and deliver solutions with speed.

We cannot control where the world is heading. But we can absolutely influence where Bleckmann lands.

Today presents enormous opportunities for us. We have positioned ourselves to serve major global customer accounts — customers requiring integrated services throughout the entire supply chain cycle, customers expecting us to support them across multiple countries, and customers asking us to follow them into entirely new territories. But growth will not spoil us. We will not compromise our service standards, our entrepreneurial spirit, or our customer focus. Regardless of size, we will continue treating every customer as though they are our only customer.

We will not only remain a strong European player with a global presence. We will become one of the most innovative and technologically advanced fulfilment and supply chain companies in the world.

But most importantly, we will preserve and further strengthen the culture that made Bleckmann successful in the first place. Because despite all the technology surrounding us, logistics remains a people business. Behind every successful automation project, warehouse launch, transport movement, and customer solution, there are teams working with passion, urgency, ownership, and commitment.

When I look at cities like Shanghai, Shenzhen, or Chongqing, I do not only see skyscrapers, lights, or futuristic infrastructure. I see a glimpse of how rapidly the world is moving forward. And I strongly believe Bleckmann possesses all the ingredients necessary not only to keep up with this future — but be a part of it.

The more I travel the world, the more I get to know our Bleckmann colleagues, and the more I meet both our existing and future customers, the easier it becomes to connect the dots. And the stronger my confidence becomes: as a company, we are already doing amazing things. However, I genuinely believe our best years are still ahead of us. And although this could potentially be my final letter to our team members and customers as the Interim CEO of Bleckmann, rest assured that, as Chairman of the Board, I will continue working closely together with our future CEO and our EXCO members to ensure that, within our beloved Bleckmann, the energy remains high, the ambition remains strong, and the vision remains clear and focused.

Thank you all for being part of this journey.

Gokalp

CEO
Bleckmann

SOURCE BEFORE STRATEGY

Your circular strategy starts with understanding where your pre-loved products come from.

Images courtesy of Bleckmann

Which inflows are right for your brand?

A holistic and strategically aligned approach is key to scaling circularity beyond the pilot stage and delivering real value to both brands and customers.

When many brands think about circularity, the conversation tends to start with the outcome, whether it's a resale channel, a repair service, a take-back programme, or yet another creative business model. However, this ignores the equally important question of where the pre-loved products are coming from in the first place. Understanding your 'inflows' is essential in determining which circular programmes are likely to be the best suited to your brand – and which will deliver the best return commercially and from a compliance perspective.

Identify the inflows that will work best for your brand's circularity strategy, and find the right combination to create lasting value for your customers.

BEYOND BRANDED RESALE: MAPPING YOUR CIRCULAR OPTIONS

Each of these inflows fits a different operational starting point, customer profile and commercial objective. The critical question is which inflow or combination of inflows best fits your brand – and how that may evolve over the coming months and years.

HOW TO IDENTIFY THE RIGHT INFLOW(S) FOR YOUR BRAND

No two brands arrive at circularity from the same position, which is why identifying the right starting point is as important as having the ambition to act. "A brand's first circular steps will be defined by a broad spectrum of factors, including its product range, typical inflow profile and regulatory exposure," explains Hans Robben, Programme Director of the Renewal Workshop operations at Bleckmann. "Our repair and cleaning expertise is the foundation, but it's our strategic ability to identify and streamline the right circular pathway that allows brands to scale their circular buy-in, whatever their entry point."

For example, damaged returns are often a profitable place to start, allowing brands to mitigate the cost of lost stock. The surf and winter sports brand O'Neill is a good example of a brand that built its circular capability into the returns process itself. For products returned with damage, we helped O'Neill develop a sophisticated sorting system so items can be efficiently repaired by the Renewal Workshop team. This offering for rescuing damaged returns is attracting particular interest given the EU's forthcoming ban on the destruction of unsold goods and returned products.

Meanwhile, when it comes to mitigating the cost of goods damaged in the pre-consumer phase, the fashion brand Karl Lagerfeld took a different route. Its Repair Atelier project, set up at our warehouse in Almelo, the Netherlands, managed to bring a majority of damaged garments back to A-grade – ensuring they could be returned to stock and sold as new. This

Strategic Pathways for Circular Product Inflows

Developing a circular strategy requires understanding 'inflows'—where pre-loved or rejected products originate. By mapping these seven pathways, brands can determine which programmes deliver the best commercial and compliance returns.

Customer-Led Inflows

Trade-In & Resale

Pre-loved products exchanged for store credit, then reconditioned for branded resale channels.

Customer Repair & Warranty

Garments sent to a Renewal Workshop site for repair before being returned.

Rental Models

Products used by multiple customers, with professional cleaning and repairs between uses.

Supply Chain & End-of-Life Inflows

Damaged Returns

Sorting and renewing faulty returns return before market reach.

Production Errors

Sorting and renewing pre-consumer production rejects before market reach.

Remake & Upcycle

Transforming pre-consumer garments into entirely new products rather than discarding them

Feedstock Textile Sorters

Collecting end-of-life garments specifically for recycling or fibre recovery processes.

means items sustaining minor damage during transit or storage before they ever reach a customer don't add to disposal or recycling costs. In addition, keeping products at their highest value contributes to the brand's sustainability strategy.

COMBINING FLOWS TO MAXIMISE VALUE

An additional consideration when planning your circularity strategy is the potential interconnection between different streams. This has two main benefits. First, it ensures that you can obtain the maximum possible circular value from your products and avoid unsaleable items. For example, some damaged returns are in a condition where restoring them cost-efficiently to an A-grade standard isn't feasible. In these cases, it might make sense to redirect these items to a recommerce (resale) channel, whereby customers can buy repaired items, often at a discount. This also has the benefit of attracting new customers who might not otherwise have tried your brand.

The second benefit of an interconnected approach relates to how customers experience your circular offering. "It doesn't matter how efficiently you repair and clean the items if the specific renewal stream isn't aligned with the expectations of your audience and your inflows," continues Hans. "That's why a holistic and strategically aligned approach to circular adoption has become so necessary to scale circularity beyond the pilot stage."

A notable example of this in action is premium luggage and accessory brand Db Journey's Lost & Found programme. This began with the launch of product trade-in, through which customers can return used travel gear in exchange for store credit. Items are reconditioned by the Renewal Workshop team and resold by Db Journey on a dedicated section of their e-commerce site. Lost & Found has since expanded to include customer repairs, building out the brand's circular ecosystem and giving customers even more ways to engage with the brand beyond the initial purchase.

MORE THAN A TREND: WHAT MAKES CIRCULAR SOLUTIONS STICK?

Of course, choosing the right inflow is only half the equation; executing reliably at scale is where circular programmes can fall down. Behind every successful operation is careful research into the most effective methods for each specific product category and inflow. The Lost & Found initiative, for example, was built on a dedicated pilot with an industry expert to establish the most effective ways of reconditioning travel gear. That groundwork – testing repair methods, establishing quality standards and mapping operational flows – is what can separate a circular programme that scales from one that remains a pilot.

The other essential factor is the strength of the partnership. Circular programmes that endure are often the result of co-creation with a partner who brings both operational depth and strategic flexibility – ensuring reliable execution across inflow types and enabling the solution mix to evolve over time. And as compliance obligations increase and the secondhand market accelerates, the cost of getting circularity wrong, or not engaging at all, is also growing. "We're excited to support even more clients to take the next step on their circular journeys and accelerate their sustainability strategies," concludes Hans. "Whatever inflow is right for you, we'll help you to make it a success."

EUROPE WITHIN REACH

With product physically in Europe, Kulani can unlock faster delivery, easier returns and stronger wholesale conversations.

Images courtesy of Kulani Kinis

Kulani Kinis *goes live in Europe*

Sun, sand, and next-day delivery. How we're supporting cult Australian swimwear and apparel brand to power its growth strategy

For founders Dani Atkins and Alex Babich, it all started in a garage with just a website, some milk crates and a conviction that the e-commerce swimwear market was missing something: bikinis that were stylish, affordable, and actually well made. That was in 2015. A decade on, their brand, Kulani Kinis, has over a million Instagram followers, partnerships with leading US retailers including Nordstrom, ASOS, Urban Outfitters.

While the US accounts for roughly 75% of Kulani's revenue, Europe represents a key growth opportunity. The beach and resort culture make it a natural fit. The brand already has a loyal following. However, the lack of a warehousing footprint on the continent meant that shipping took up to six days. Now, with Bleckmann as its warehousing and distribution partner – operating from Venlo in the Netherlands – Kulani has been able to deliver a range of strategic improvements to the customer experience.

THE VALUE OF SPECIALIST EXPERTISE

Alongside speed, maintaining high service quality is essential for a successful expansion. Therefore, it's no surprise that one of the deciding factors for Kulani Kinis was our strong focus on fashion and lifestyle. "What really stood out was that Bleckmann isn't a generalist player; they have the deep expertise we need," says Will North, Head of Commercial and Performance at Kulani Kinis. "Our products demand careful handling and precise presentation, so Bleckmann's consistent performance and strong capabilities around fulfilment accuracy and value-added services were pivotal."

What also made the onboarding more streamlined was our experience in swimwear, meaning we understand the specific requirements of this category – including the nuances of returns. "What helped to convince Kulani Kinis to come on board was that we could immediately point to other swimwear brands that we handle in the same facility," says Ming-Chia Tu, Project Manager at Bleckmann. "Swimwear and bikinis are

"With fulfilment now based in Venlo, many customers will receive their orders the next day via local carriers they know and trust. We can also offer free shipping on orders over €100, which wasn't possible under the previous arrangement. And returns are also processed in-country, improving efficiency. It's great that our European customers can directly benefit from these operational enhancements."

- Melissa Blume, Head of Customer Experience, Kulani Kinis

CONFIDENCE TO SCALE

Specialist fashion logistics gives Kulani the confidence to scale its cult swimwear brand across Europe.

Images courtesy of Kulani Kinis

hygiene-sensitive products," adds Tim van Vlodrop, Venlo Site Manager at Bleckmann. "We have a whole dedicated process: replacing hygiene stickers, refolding and visual checks."

A site visit reinforced the positive impression. Arriving after Black Friday, the Kulani team was pleasantly surprised by the conditions they found following the busiest retail period of the year. "Everything was running like clockwork," notes Will. "That told us exactly what we needed to know. Something else that really stood out was the staff facilities; they were second to none, which matters a lot to us as we're very people-oriented." The emphasis on collaboration continued throughout the onboarding phase. Despite the significant time difference, the implementation went smoothly – with teams joining early-morning and late-night calls to work through everything from IT integration to operational setup.

LAUNCHING IN EUROPE WITH CONFIDENCE

For a brand that had previously managed its European shipping through one Australian 3PL provider, setting up a base in Europe brought a steep learning curve. "Europe is not an easy market," continues Ming-Chia. "Within one continent, there are many exceptions – and if you're operating from the other side of the world, it can be challenging. For example, mainland France is served by one carrier, but the islands around it are served by a different carrier, and Spain is similar. It's definitely not 'one country, one carrier'. These things are second nature to us, but they needed careful management."

The full scope of the operation within Europe more broadly added further complexity – the UK, Switzerland, Norway, and Iceland fall outside the EU's single market, each requiring separate customs clearance and carrier arrangements. Also on the agenda were EORI registration and VAT compliance across many countries. Being able to provide expert advice and support on these areas through our experts meant Kulani could enter Europe quickly and confidently, without having to build up that expertise from scratch.

EUROPE UNLOCKED FOR STRATEGIC GROWTH

Efficient and expert fulfilment isn't just an operational nice-to-have for Kulani Kinis; it's a key catalyst of its growth strategy. In the US, the company built its growth on a self-reinforcing 'flywheel' model: strong social buzz and direct-to-consumer performance attracts wholesalers looking to stock the labels their customers are asking for. Physical retail then reinforces the brand online, drawing in new customers and reassuring those who might otherwise hesitate to buy online. Each part reinforces the next – and streamlined delivery and simplified returns accelerate the process, driving loyalty.

For example, the partnership went live alongside the launch of Kulani's new Espresso Island collection, putting the new fulfilment set-up to the test from day one. Launching a new collection and a new logistics operation simultaneously is a clear sign of confidence.

With Bleckmann as its fulfilment partner, Kulani Kinis can now look to replicate its US success in Europe. "Having product physically on the continent makes everything easier, from marketing activations to wholesale conversations," explains Will. "When potential partners see that you've got reliable local-based fulfilment in place, that you're truly invested in growing your footprint, it sends a very clear signal: we're here to stay."

Flexible fulfilment, local returns and value-added services help brands scale without compromising customer experience.

Images courtesy of Bleckmann

Bscale expands *across the English Channel*

As our award-winning plug-and-play logistics solution goes live in new geographies, find out how it's helping our clients unlock new opportunities for international growth.

Having started in 2025 as a pilot at our site in Grobbendonk, Belgium, our Bscale solution has grown quickly. Designed to simplify fulfilment for brands of all sizes, it now provides over 20 clients with streamlined access to a broad range of supply chain services. And we've recently extended the service to the UK and the Netherlands, giving even more growing brands the logistics expertise they need without the traditional barriers to entry.

Accessible to both new and existing clients, Bscale is also made for brands with an eye on international growth. And it works in both directions: whether you're an EU-based brand looking to enter the UK market, or a British brand ready to move into the heart of the Benelux region, Bscale could be the key to unlocking your next chapter of expansion.

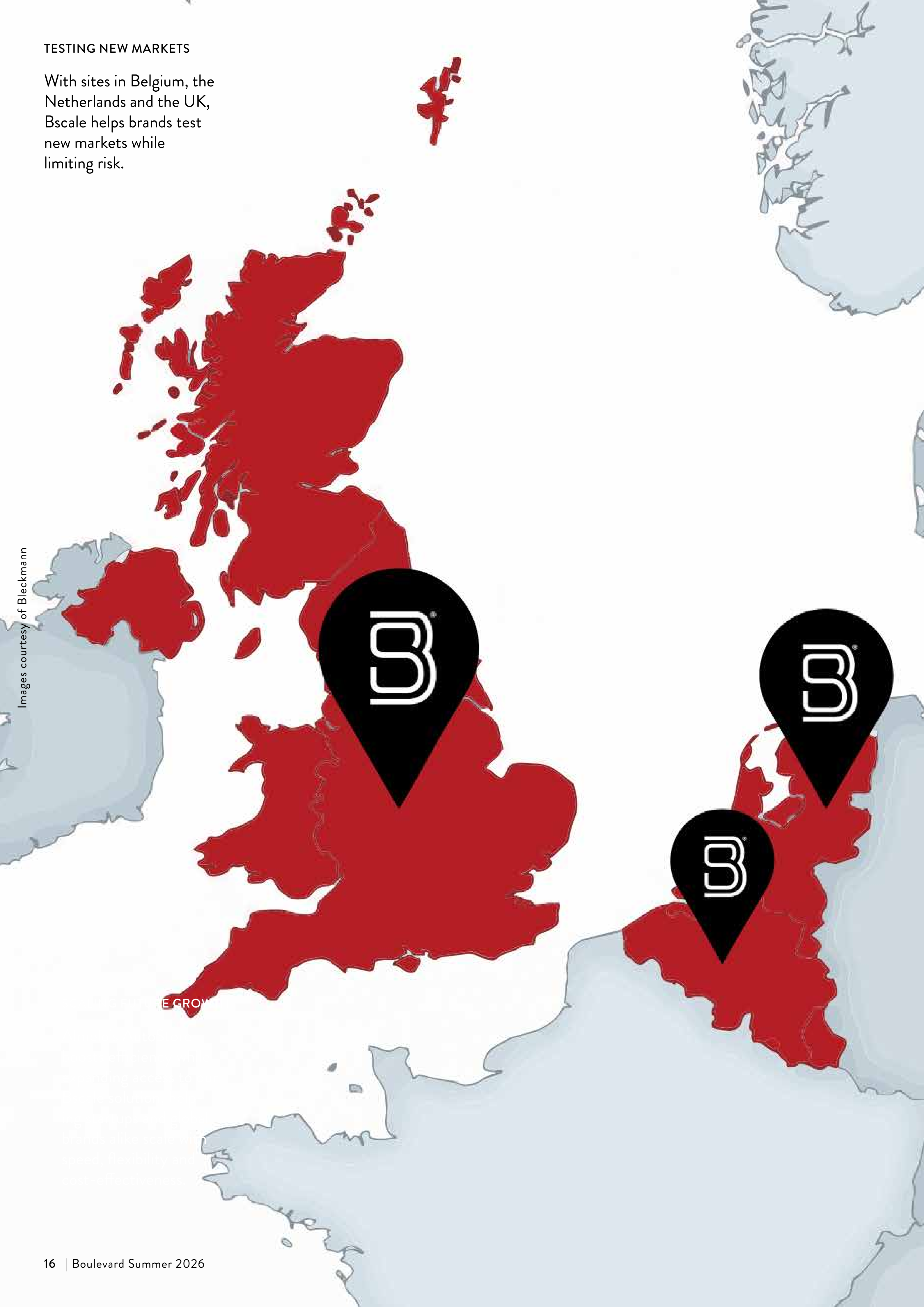
Read on to learn more about Bscale's evolution and how this latest expansion chapter is opening up new international opportunities for brands on both sides of the Channel.

"By offering access to the same Bleckmann expertise, infrastructure and technology enjoyed by globally established brands, we're supporting scale-up companies to stay focused on building their brands while we take care of the logistics."

- Maxim Sion, Business Development Manager – Global Sales, Bleckmann

TESTING NEW MARKETS

With sites in Belgium, the Netherlands and the UK, Bscale helps brands test new markets while limiting risk.



Images courtesy of Bleckmann

WHAT IS BSCALE?

Bscale is our modular, plug-and-play warehousing and fulfilment offering, designed to support brands of all sizes with enterprise-grade logistics. With an online, self-service model, it's simple, flexible and built to make scalable growth achievable and accessible.

SCALABLE AND COST-EFFECTIVE:

Built on a standardised, 'pay-as-you-grow' model, Bscale helps you build your business without the need for significant upfront investments.

A GENUINE ONE-STOP SHOP:

Our intuitive online portal lets you plan, organise and manage all your logistics services from a single dashboard.

OPENING DOORS TO NEW MARKETS:

Existing clients can flexibly test out the UK, Dutch and Belgian markets while limiting risk.

SELF-SERVICE SIMPLICITY:

Brands can onboard themselves and go live within days.

A SCALABLE SOLUTION DEVELOPED BY EXPERTS

A key factor in the success of Bscale is that it was created by a fashion entrepreneur: Maxim Sion, Business Development Manager – Global Sales at Bleckmann. The founder of two fashion brands, Black & Gold and Studio Anvers, Maxim has an intimate knowledge of the operational backbone needed to grow your brand – and how hard it can be to access it. "When we were in the expansion phase at Black & Gold, it was difficult to find a logistics provider who would support us with the capacity we needed," he explains. "Bscale was designed specifically to address that gap, unburdening brands so they can focus on what they do best: creating products and collections that customers love."

In addition to serving new UK- and Netherlands-based clients, Bscale can be a route for larger brands to test out a new market without making significant operational investments. For example, say a Belgian brand wants to take its first steps in the UK without incurring costly duties every time a customer returns a product. Having inventory in-country with Bscale can significantly simplify returns and reduce customs exposure. This can also be a hidden customer experience lever: a local UK warehouse means that returns can be processed much quicker than if they had to be sent back across the Channel. Customers can therefore get their refund quicker, improving brand perception.

EXPANDING AN AWARD-WINNING INNOVATION

Thanks to, among other features, its flexible and scalable self-service model, Bscale has already been recognised by the logistics industry as an innovative solution. At the 2025 SupplyTech Breakthrough Awards, it secured first place in the '3PL Solution of the Year' category, cementing its position as a tech-enabled logistics toolkit for growing brands. The win was also, in part, due to its use of the AutoStore automated storage and retrieval system (ASRS). This integrated goods-to-person picking system uses autonomous robots to pick products from storage bins and transport them to the packing area – speeding up operations and driving consistent reductions in fulfilment lead times.

However, increased speed should not mean compromising on the customer experience in other areas. After all, many growing brands are built on strong customer relationships cultivated over years. "When brands are transitioning to third-party logistics for the first time, it's important to maintain a good balance between improved speed and efficiency and customer care," continues Maxim. "Alongside end-to-end fulfilment, Bscale clients get access to our portfolio of value-added services, including ironing, quality inspections and luxury packaging. That way, you can boldly target geographical expansion without having to compromise on the high-quality service level that customers expect."

Want to find out if Bscale is the right next step for your brand? Learn more and get a quote in minutes by visiting our website: ***bleckmann.com/bscale-solution***

BUILT-IN RESILIENCE

Security should be designed into every warehouse, handover and delivery touchpoint.

Security matters: *protecting the supply chain*

Explore how we integrate physical and digital security protocols into our service offering to deliver safe, traceable logistics solutions

While it's usually only noticed when something goes wrong, supply chain security is a key element of a successful logistics partnership. Even though it typically isn't given the same attention or priority as other criteria like lead times, returns management or process Key Performance Indicators, it's at least as important for a brand's customer experience. We interviewed Bleckmann's security experts to provide further context on why security should receive a more prominent spot on brands' checklist of criteria for logistics providers. We also discussed how it's possible to 'design in' resilience for physical and digital or cyber security to safeguard our company against current and future threats.

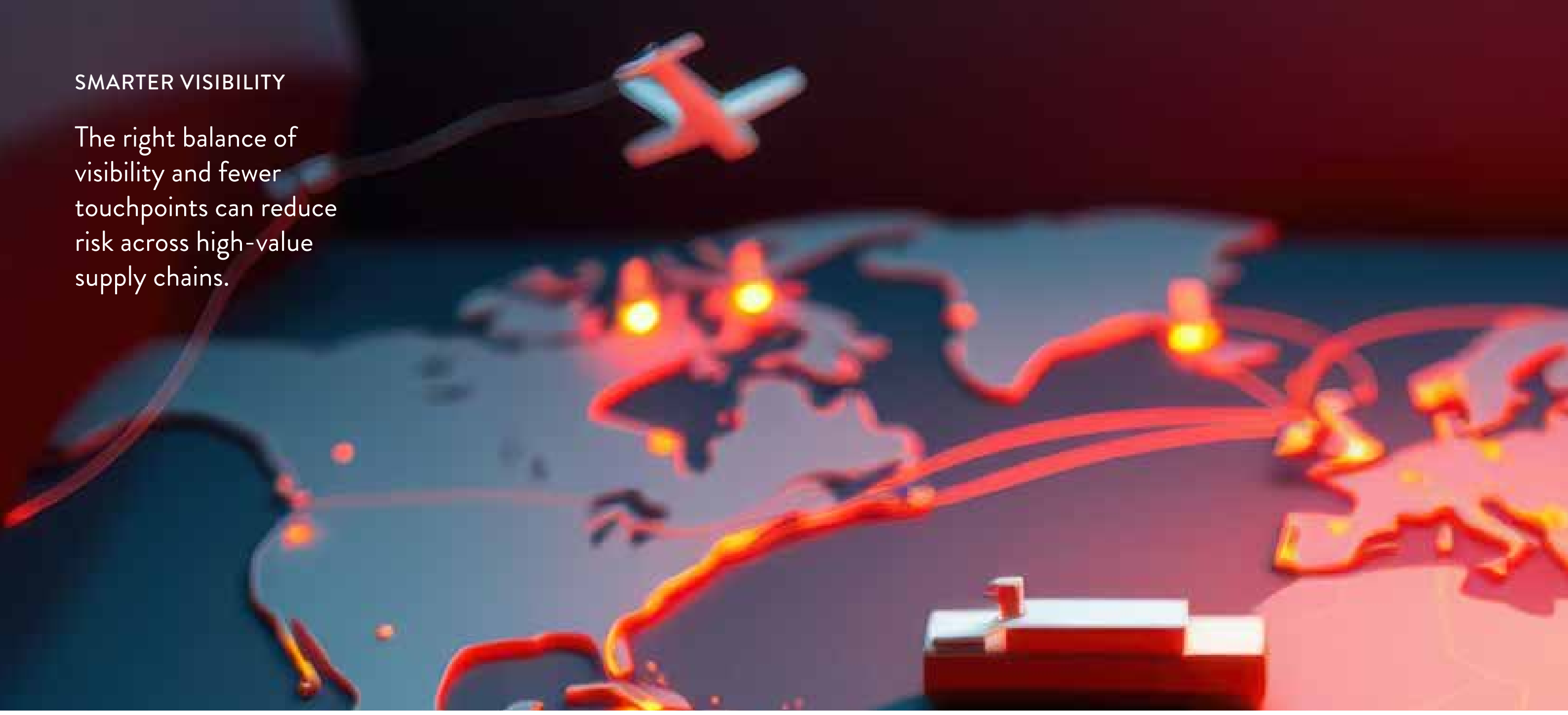
Read on to explore the strategic importance of supply chain security and how, together with industry leaders like Securitas, we continuously develop and improve our security infrastructure.

SECURING HIGH-VALUE GOODS IN OUR WAREHOUSES

The most visible examples of our comprehensive supply chain security approach are the physical measures. These include mesh cages for high-value products to ensure access control, with 24/7 surveillance, as well as lockable doors and even roof panels. Our sites are TAPA Facility Security Requirements (FSR) certified at B or C level, depending on the type of inventory we're holding. Locations that operate under bonded status are subjected to even higher standards requiring additional accreditations. A good example of this is being granted the Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) status, which is an internationally recognised certification, confirming the robustness of our physical security and governance framework.

"The maturity of our security procedures underpins the stability and reliability of our services, helping us build trust with end consumers and deliver on our customers' promises."

- Edwin Geerligs , Head of Global Security, Bleckmann



Achieving and upholding these high standards demands close coordination across security, site management, operations and client services, with every function playing an important role. "Over and above the infrastructure itself and everything that comes with it – insurance, surveillance, certifications and high-value cages – security is always a collaborative effort," explains Edwin Geerligs, Head of Global Security at Bleckmann. "The support of all the managers and operations directors is, for example, of vital importance because they're our eyes and ears in the field. But equally, we work closely with our clients to design a solution that meets a brand's specific needs. It's a collaborative process during which we aim to guide and consult on security measures best suited to their products and their processes."

For clients handling particularly high-value goods, think luxury handbags, jewellery or high-end electronics, our security protocols extend well beyond the cages. During the inbound process, for example, it is essential to conduct 100% quantity and quality checks to confirm every item against supplier documentation. All discrepancies are immediately reported to the client. During storage, access to high-value areas is restricted to a limited number of authorised personnel. Packaging for these types of products is deliberately kept rather discreet. Boxes and pouches are intentionally kept plain and unbranded to ensure that the contents of a shipment aren't apparent during transport and delivery.

The last mile is another key security factor. Based on specific criteria, such as extended insurance, specific protocols and proof-of-delivery reporting, specific carriers and last-mile couriers are selected. This ensures a well-documented and professionally managed and monitored chain of custody right up to the customer's doorstep.

BUILDING A JOINED-UP SECURITY ECOSYSTEM

When you think about maximum security protocols, you probably think more about world leaders embarking on international trips than about fashion and lifestyle inventory. Nevertheless, practically all multi-stage security operations rely on similar key principles: transparency, communication and full-cycle visibility at every phase of the operation.

Bleckmann's partnership with Securitas is a prime example of how to embed all three in our shared day-to-day operations. We securely store, process, track and distribute official uniforms for its 6,000 employees in Belgium and Luxembourg. The uniforms are highly sensitive goods because theft or loss could lead to impersonation of security personnel. "To minimise risks, we developed a fully traceable logistics solution powered by radio frequency identification (RFID)," explains Edwin Geerligs, Bleckmann's Head of Global Security. "As part of the setup, Securitas employees can order, receive and return uniforms for activities such as repair via a secure e-fulfilment platform. It is again the RFID technology that allows for every uniform to be tracked and accounted for on a 24/7 basis."

Our work with Securitas demonstrates the importance of identifying and solving potential supply chain 'blind spots' to improve the visibility and therefore security of high-value items. There is always an element of risk involved when products are handed over from the warehouse to the delivery teams, and vice versa. However, since every uniform is tagged and assigned to a known individual, we can scan items when they enter and leave our fulfilment centres. We also use premium last-mile delivery carriers with signature confirmation upon delivery to ensure end-to-end accountability and visibility of goods. By connecting our warehouse and transport management systems, we create an integrat-

ed security ecosystem whereby we're always able to track items at predetermined checkpoints in the processes.

THE VISIBILITY/SECURITY TRADE-OFF

Achieving end-to-end visibility across the supply chain is not simply a matter of adding more checkpoints. It requires careful, strategic thinking about where, when and how goods are processed and treated. Each time a product is touched, scanned or transferred between carriers, there is an opportunity for something to go wrong. This is why we work closely with clients to design transport lanes that balance visibility with security, advising on carrier handovers and scanning points during transport to fit their specific security needs and risk profile.

For certain high-value shipments, fewer touchpoints and more direct routing are the right answer, even if this means slightly less granular tracking data. "Security is a nuanced conversation," explains Matthias Vandecasteele, Sales Director for Lifestyle. "How we approach it reflects our commitment to building security solutions around the client's needs, including risk-triggered processes, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach."

SECURITY AS A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

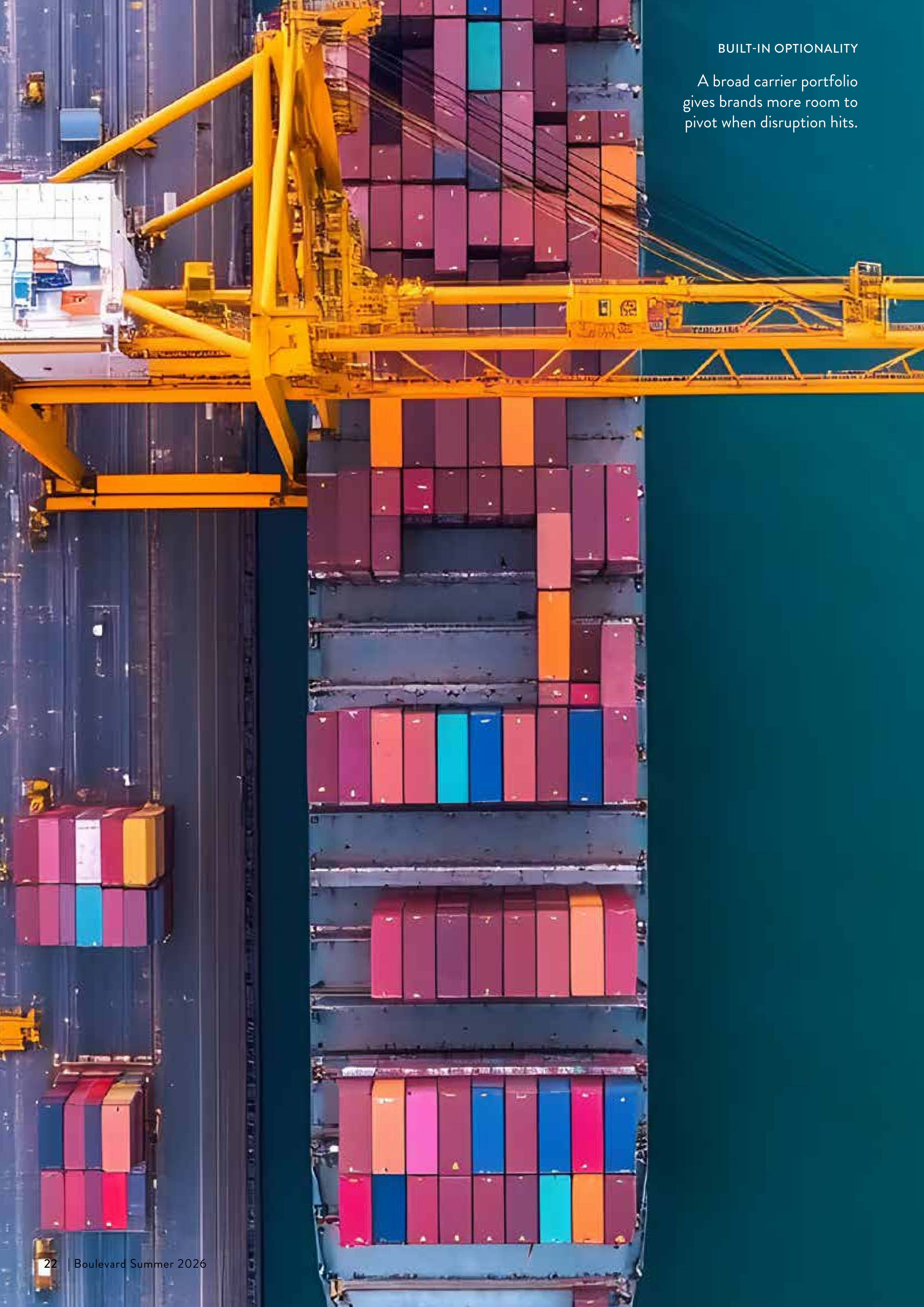
The future of supply chain security is not simply about building higher walls. It is all about building smarter, more adaptive systems. Across the industry, the conversation is shifting: security is no longer viewed as a cost centre or as a mere compliance obligation, but as a direct enabler of operational stability, client trust and competitive differentiation. "Security maturity drives operational stability," observes Erik Janssen Steenberg, Business Development Director. "Stability underpins customer trust, and trust becomes a differentiator in competitive markets."

This shift is largely being driven by technology. Continuous, automated monitoring is replacing periodic audits, creating always-on intelligence systems that provide real-time insight rather than periodic snapshots of risk that were present during handling and transporting. Zero-trust, 100%-visibility architecture, in which every partner, every system and every access request is continuously verified, is rapidly becoming the new industry standard. As AI accelerates both the sophistication of security systems and the speed of incident response, the organisations that invest in these capabilities today will be significantly better positioned tomorrow.

At Bleckmann, this strategic perspective shapes everything from how we configure individual client solutions to how we think about the future of our network. Security is not a department, a cage, or a checkbox. It is a mindset, one that runs through every scan, every handover and every partnership. As Erik puts it: "The greatest risk today is not continuously improving and evolving."

OFFERING SECURITY AS AN INTEGRATED SERVICE

Although the concept of supply chain security is not new, it's changing fast. The focus is shifting from avoiding risks to developing intelligent systems that are always operational and provide 24/7 oversight. "With the technology now at our disposal, supply chains are becoming increasingly well connected, with fewer gaps or 'black holes' where we can't track a product's location or status," concludes Edwin. "The maturity of our tracking and security procedures underpins the stability and reliability of our services, helping us to build trust with end consumers and deliver on our customers' promises."



BUILT-IN OPTIONALITY

A broad carrier portfolio gives brands more room to pivot when disruption hits.

3PL freight forwarding *in turbulent times*

From geopolitical tensions to industry consolidation, there are many reasons for fashion and lifestyle brands to build flexibility into their freight-forwarding strategy.

From the Suez Canal blockage to COVID-19 and fuel price spikes, recent years have seen multiple shocks to global freight-forwarding networks. And with the recent conflict in the Middle East, the disruption shows no signs of easing. Indeed, according to UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), rate volatility has increased, and the severity and overlap of disruptive events are on the rise.[1] The result is bigger and more frequent disruptions of global trade routes, longer journey times, higher costs and growing unpredictability. Against this backdrop, it's worth evaluating your freight forwarding provider options.

Read on to explore why 3PL freight forwarding, rather than direct carrier relationships, can be a smarter choice for brands looking to mitigate supply chain costs and risks.

THE LIMITS OF SINGLE-CARRIER RELATIONSHIPS

Brands typically choose to contract with a single carrier to 'keep things simple' or for the perceived cost savings. But do these perceived benefits actually stack up? In many ways, it's not the case. "If you go directly with a certain carrier, they always prioritise their own boats, so Plan A is their sailings. But if Plan A is not working, Plan B is also their sailings. And so too are Plans C, D, E, and F," explains Celine Lensink, Contract Manager for Freight at Bleckmann. "In other words, under a single-carrier contract, you don't really have any fallback options – leaving much less room to pivot when the unexpected happens."

On the other hand, working with a 3PL for freight forwarding brings a much higher degree of flexibility. 3PLs typically have a broad portfolio of freight partnerships, so they can select the best sailing, flight or truck departure from multiple carriers for any situation. This means they can more effectively balance rates, reliability and speed. It's why a multi-carrier approach is viewed as a valuable risk-reduction mechanism by industry analysts.

The near-continuous disruptions of the past few years have reinforced the growing importance of such measures. "We've seen a fundamental shift in what 'good' looks like for clients," explains Joey de Lang, Freight Forwarding and Operations Manager. "True supply chain resilience has evolved from operational consideration to vital competitive asset – because, at the end of the day, it results in a better customer experience."

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A FREIGHT FORWARDER

- Broad portfolio of carrier relationships
- Genuine multi-modal expertise
- Strategic advisory excellence
- Proven capabilities with your required routes
- Real-time supply chain visibility solutions

WHEN LOCKED-IN PRICING DOESN'T MAKE SENSE

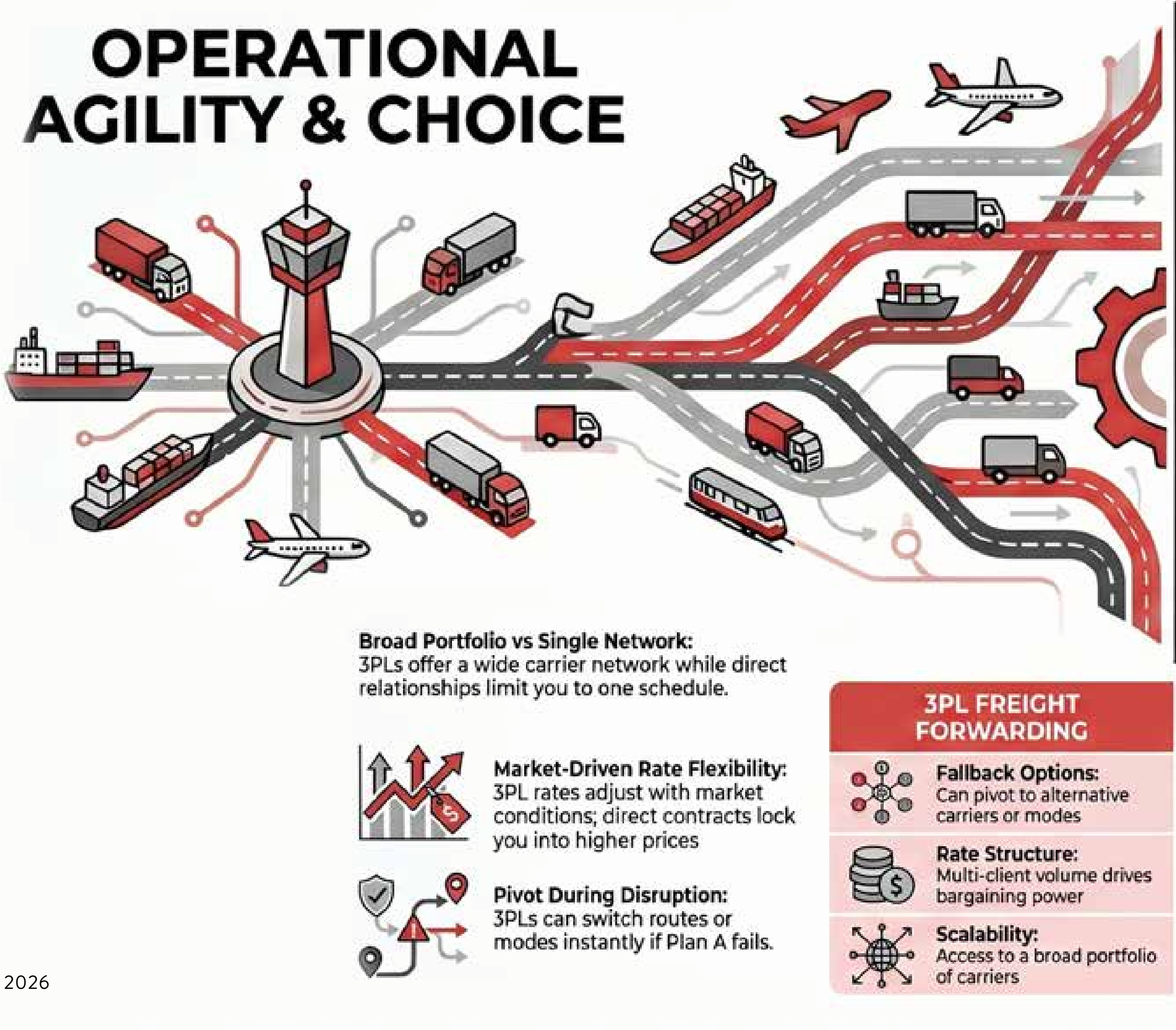
The lock-in effect of single-supplier contracts doesn't only result in a lack of strategic flexibility; it can also prevent a brand from benefitting when freight rates fall. In contrast, a 3PL's flexible approach enables you to capitalise when rates move in your favour. "Being 'locked in' with a single provider can prove more costly in the long run," continues Celine. "On the other hand, a 3PL has its pick of carriers and can pass on any cost savings to the client."

Traditionally, it has only been the larger brands that can benefit from preferential rates. However, 3PLs are changing the game. With multi-client volume, they have significant bargaining power – meaning emerging and medium-sized brands can also ship more for less. "The added rate flexibility you get with a 3PL is particularly relevant in light of the emergency surcharges that many brands have faced due to the uncertainty brought by recent conflicts," adds Joey. "These increase landed cost and compress margins. And while there's no way to mitigate rate rises entirely, optionality is by far your best bet."

OPERATIONAL INTEGRATION AND SUPPLY CHAIN TRANSPARENCY

Alongside the potential cost benefits of managing freight forwarding through your 3PL provider, there are several operational and strategic advantages. To start with, operational visibility is simplified. Brands that consolidate warehousing and freight forwarding with a 3PL remove a major source of potential 'grey area' in the supply chain, increasing both transparency and accountability. This way, brands always know the status of their inventory via a single point of contact, driving improved forecasting.

These shorter lines of communication can also unlock smart optimisations. For example, a 3PL can connect directly to a brand's own ERP or supply chain platform via EDI (Electronic Data Interchange). This means that every time a key shipping milestone is reached, such as a booking confirmation, bill of lading, customs clearance or delivery, the relevant data is automatically pushed into the brand's own system. There's no manual re-entry, no chasing updates and no risk of teams working from out-of-date information. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, 3PL freight forwarding can significantly unburden internal teams. "Major brands are choosing to consolidate their freight forwarding with their existing 3PL partner precisely to keep everything under one umbrella and reduce the often-high coordination overhead that comes with managing multiple providers," says Celine. "The fewer people involved in your supply chain, the lower your cost and the lower your risk of delay." For brands that are growing quickly or navigating a complex international distribution network, this integration can be a key competitive advantage.



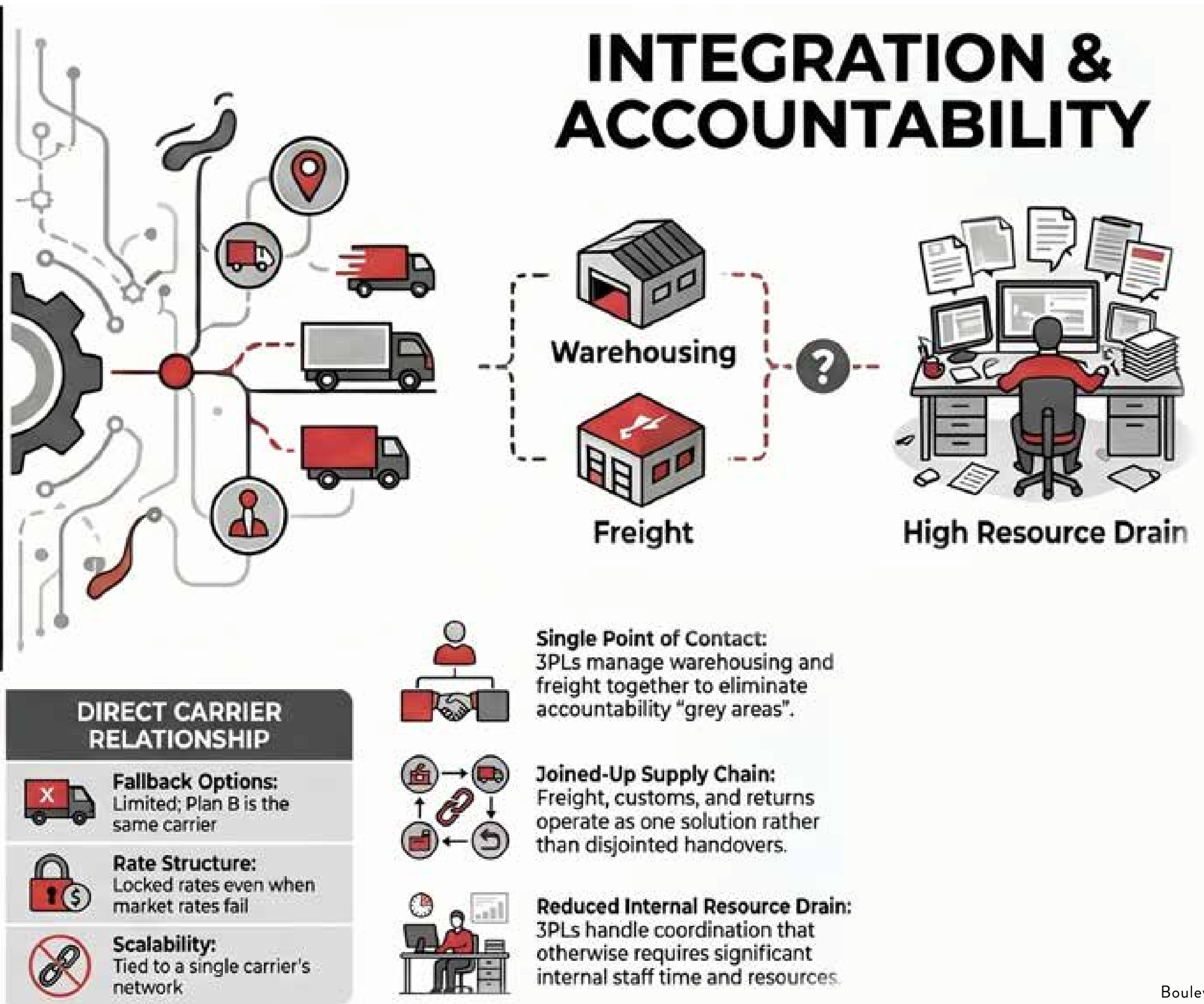
CASE STUDY: 25-DAY TRANSIT TIMES DESPITE INTERNATIONAL DISRUPTION

Sea–air is an increasingly popular multimodal freight forwarding method, allowing clients to combine the cost benefits of ocean freight with the speed of air freight. For example, we'd been supporting one client to organise and manage end-to-end sea–air transportation flows. This involved a carefully designed multimodal routing via Dubai. Thanks to this highly coordinated port-to-port solution, we consistently achieved an average transit time of 25 days, meeting the customer's lead time requirements.

When the conflict in the Middle East escalated, we had to proactively reassess the routing to safeguard service continuity and cargo security. We rapidly implemented an alternative solution via Vancouver, Canada, fully avoiding the affected region. Shipments from the main ports of Shanghai and Shenzhen were smoothly transitioned into the new lane, and through close coordination with all stakeholders, we maintained the agreed 25-day transit time throughout. This swift decision-making was possible thanks to the short lines of communication with the client, a strategic benefit of 3PL freight forwarding.

BUYING RESILIENCE: THE BENEFITS OF A TOTAL-COST OUTLOOK

In today's supply chains, the risks are greater, more widespread and more frequent than ever. From geopolitical flashpoints to carrier consolidation, the forces shaping global freight require a whole-supply-chain approach. "A key element of our job is looking at the whole picture with regard to the freight landscape," concludes Celine. "It's not only about lead times but also about optionality, reliability and resilience. In our view, the best way to achieve that is a broad carrier portfolio, deep market intelligence and well-integrated operations. Taking this broader view of the freight landscape means asking not just 'who's cheapest' but 'who can keep things moving when something goes wrong?"



BEYOND RECYCLING

Brands need to reduce waste at the source, not just manage it at the end of the product lifecycle.

Data foundation: *EU's Green Deal*

Green Deal readiness now depends on strong data foundations. Brands that connect waste, packaging and traceability data will be better prepared for compliance and circular growth.

The EU's Green Deal legislation, which aims to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, has major implications for the fashion and lifestyle industries. And with key compliance deadlines starting to come into force, many brands are wondering what they need to do to prepare. Read on for insights on three key areas covered by the legislation: waste, packaging and product traceability. The key to succeeding in all of these areas? A focused and holistic approach to data management. To learn more, check out our website to watch our new series of interviews on Green Deal topics.

UPCOMING COMPLIANCE DEADLINES

LEGISLATION	DATE	OBLIGATION
ESPR	July 2026 (for large companies; applicable to medium-sized companies from 2030)	Ban on destruction of unsold and returned apparel and footwear [i]
PPWR	August 2026	Core obligations apply e.g. packaging design, EPR fees [ii]
ESPR/DPP	2027	First DPPs operational for priority categories (including textiles) [iii]
WFD/EPR	April 2028	National textile EPR schemes operational across Europe [iv]
ESPR	2030	Ban on destruction of unsold and returned goods extended to mid-sized companies [v]

DEFINITIONS:

ESPR: European Sustainable Products Regulation
PPWR: Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation
DPP: Digital Product Passport
WFD/EPR: Waste Framework Directive/Extended Producer Responsibility

TRACEABILITY MATTERS

Digital Product Passports will make product-level data essential for compliance, resale and repair.

Images courtesy of Bleckmann

RADICAL TRANSPARENCY: THE NEW WASTE LANDSCAPE

A key focus of the Green Deal legislation is product and packaging waste. This will require both brands and logistics providers to implement dedicated monitoring protocols to ensure full coverage of their waste flows. In particular, the Waste Framework Directive (WFD) and Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation (PPWR) represent a fundamental shift in how waste is understood, measured and managed. Importantly, the EU's approach goes further than managing product end-of-life.

"The new waste landscape is built around what's known as the 'waste hierarchy'", explains Ron Thijssen, Manager CSR at Bleckmann. "This is a five-step framework, enshrined in EU law, that ranks waste management options from most to least preferable. At the top is prevention – not generating waste in the first place. Then comes preparing for reuse, followed by recycling, then recovery – such as energy recovery – and, finally, as a last resort, disposal. The message to brands is clear: recycling alone isn't enough."

SMART STRATEGIES TO REDUCE WASTE AT THE SOURCE

So, how can brands effectively adapt to legislation like the PPWR? The regulation applies the waste hierarchy logic with the aim of reducing total packaging volume and weight, limiting the empty space in packaging and improving recyclability. While space and recyclability rules are relatively simple to meet with design and operational solutions (such as automatic box-cutters), reducing total packaging volumes and increasing reuse is more complex. It requires a system-level rethink.

So, what measures can brands take to reduce waste at source? One 'at-source' solution is to challenge the idea that cardboard should be the default packaging material – replacing it with a robust, reusable alternative. Sports retailer Decathlon, for example, has worked with a partner company to eliminate one-use packaging for their click-and-collect orders at all their stores in the Netherlands. The result is reusable packaging with real circularity benefits that doesn't negatively impact the customer experience. In a sign of the feasibility of this approach, reusable packaging has now been extended to e-commerce deliveries in certain cases.[1]

MEASURE, MONITOR AND REDUCE: STEPPING UP WASTE MANAGEMENT

Alongside circular implementations like this, the PPWR legislation requires companies to introduce more comprehensive monitoring of how they handle the waste they produce. The separation and sorting of waste produced during day-to-day operations needs to be much more rigorous. For example, our facilities handle tonnes of cardboard boxes, foil, pallets and other types of materials every year. It's essential that each type is sorted and processed to ensure the maximum amount is recycled in the correct stream.

This calls for a centralised, holistic waste management framework that combines best practices with data-driven oversight. It must also be flexible enough to adapt to local requirements. "Significantly complicating the waste picture for brands is that each EU member state has its own waste management legislation," continues Ron. "Pan-European brands must therefore tailor their waste reporting and management to each country, and that's much easier when you have a robust baseline model."

WASTE MANAGEMENT AND THE CSRD

According to the EU's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD), in-scope companies must report on their 'resource outflows' (i.e. waste) under the E5 section of the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). As this will include waste generated throughout the value chain, having a clear picture of the waste management performance of your partners will be essential to achieving compliance.


DATA FIRST

Green Deal readiness starts with clear, connected data across waste, packaging and product traceability.

DIGITAL PRODUCT PASSPORTS: TRACEABILITY, GRANULARITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

While packaging is a significant cause of waste in the industry, the scope of the Green Deal is even broader. A common theme is improving the oversight of what happens to products throughout their usable lifetimes and beyond. For example, the implementation of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) under the WFD will set requirements around the collection, sorting and treatment of garments. Meanwhile, the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) will require that specific product data can be accessed digitally throughout the item's lifecycle via a Digital Product Passport (DPP) system. This information must cover the full value chain behind the product.

Frontrunners such as Nobody's Child[2] and PANGAIA[3] have adopted a proactive approach, equipping collections with digital IDs via a QR code on garment labels. This enables customers to access an overview of the product's supply chain journey, from fabric sourcing to production details. It also presents cross-selling and loyalty-building opportunities, such as offering brand-owned peer-to-peer reselling platforms similar to Vinted or Depop[4]. However, pilots have tended to be built on proprietary systems. Achieving a regulation-ready rollout for the industry will require a standardised, interoperable platform that works across brands, borders and supply chain partners.

BUILDING AN INTEROPERABLE DATA ECOSYSTEM

With DPP requirements on the horizon, research is ongoing to assess the feasibility of more detailed tracking across product categories. Recently, global not-for-profit organisation GS1 – which develops and maintains supply chain standards such as the UPC barcode – ran a pilot to stress-test product-level tracking in socks.[5] Each individual pair was assigned a GTIN (see box-out) and a GS1-powered QR code to enable granular tracking. Meanwhile, production sites were assigned a GLN. This enables the brand to build up a detailed picture of each pair's journey – from production to end-of-life – a key capability in the evolving regulatory landscape.

Alongside the practicalities of how to best attach the QR code to the sock and how to deal with items sold as pairs (what happens if they get separated?), the project raised the question of supply chain accountability. A DPP is only as useful as the data that goes into it, and it's important to note that the GS1 pilot was carried out with a vertically integrated garment producer. This simplified traceability, but fashion supply chains are often much more complex to monitor. Therefore, it's not just the digital infrastructure that brands will have to handle. They must build robust governance frameworks that drive ownership and accountability at every stage of the supply chain, ensuring reliable data collection throughout.

DPP: KEY COMPONENTS

- QR code (data carrier)
- 2D barcode that physically carries the DPP link on the product label
- Scannable by both consumer smartphones and industrial POS/warehouse scanners

GS1 DIGITAL LINK (THE URL STANDARD)

- Standardised URL structure encoded inside the QR code

- Encodes GTIN + optional extras (batch, serial no., expiry) in one scannable address

GTIN – GLOBAL TRADE ITEM NUMBER

- Unique product identifier issued by GS1
- Identifies the product type (SKU level); serial number can be used for item-level tracking

GLN – GLOBAL LOCATION NUMBER

- Unique identifier for a physical location or legal entity (factory, warehouse, retailer)
- Links each DPP event (produced at, shipped from, received by) to a verified party
- Requires suppliers to register their GLN with GS1 – cross-party data sharing only works if all partners in the chain have adopted the same standard

A TRANSPARENT CIRCULAR SYSTEM: DPP AND RENEWAL

The case for DPPs extends beyond the garment's initial life cycle. One key use case is recording whether and how garments have been repaired or restored. The Renewal Workshop, our team of circular fashion experts working at many of our locations, operates renewal models for clients across fashion (such as Otrium), accessories (such as Db Journey) and household textiles (such as Coyuchi). DPPs could have a big impact.

"What's so relevant about the repair use case for DPPs is that if you want to resell renewed items, they need to have individual item-level tracking rather than just SKU-specific traceability," explains Hans Robben, Programme Manager at The Renewal Workshop. "This ensures that customers know exactly the condition of the product they're purchasing. QR codes backed by GS1 standards make this item-level tracking possible."

FROM REGULATORY ROADBLOCKS TO BUSINESS AS USUAL

With mandatory waste reduction and monitoring becoming a regulatory reality, brands across Europe are likely to experience stumbling blocks in the coming years. But if there's one takeaway for brands, it's that this preparation shouldn't be viewed as simply an obligation, but as a catalyst to improve operational efficiency through smarter data management. "Those who don't have a solid plan in place for the forthcoming wave of regulation will soon find themselves left behind as more and more legislation comes online," concludes Ron. "Many of the elements of the Green Deal share common data points, so acting now can reinforce your overall compliance readiness, creating a positive multiplier effect. My view: see it as a growth opportunity."

Want to find out more about the impacts of the Green Deal for brands? Visit the Bleckmann website to watch our new Beyond Threads Green Deal podcast series, featuring in-depth interviews with industry experts. And for further insights, check out the 2025 Leading Circular report.

Images courtesy of Blakely

WE BELIEVE

That everyone deserves to look and feel their best in beautifully designed, super-soft clothing that will last.

US LAUNCHPAD

European brands can enter the US market with lower risk by using marketplace partnerships and pay-as-you-sell logistics.

Unlocking the US *marketplace*

Learn why US e-commerce marketplaces are still a valuable platform for fast-growing European fashion and lifestyle brands, even in the face of widespread disruption.

For emerging European brands, the US represents a golden frontier for international expansion. As the largest apparel market by revenue in the world, estimated to hit a value of $365.7 billion in 2026, the country also boasts some of the highest per-capita spending on fashion anywhere on the globe.[1] If your brand is looking for an impactful entry onto the world stage, it's an opportunity you can't afford to ignore.

However, the trade climate can make it seem like that dream is further away than ever. Tariffs on US imports, combined with the cancellation of the de minimis duty exemption, have made entering the US market appear like a costly uphill battle. Nevertheless, for those looking to expand their horizons, there's a solution: through agile partnerships with leading online marketplaces, we're helping to fully unburden brands so they can overcome traditional barriers to entry and begin selling products on the American market.

Read on to learn how working with online fashion marketplaces is helping our European clients break into the US market, positioning them for scalable, cost-effective growth.

OUR GLOBAL BRIDGE PARTNERSHIP IN BRIEF

- Enhanced global reach: Access new international markets without traditional barriers to entry.
- End-to-end logistics: Unburden your teams with seamless and reliable fulfilment performance.
- Pay as you sell™ solution: Expand to the US and beyond with no need for significant upfront investment.
- Streamlined integration: A single point of entry simplifies the legal aspects and IT onboarding.

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF THE US MARKET

One obstacle faced by brands looking to launch in a new market is a lack of audience awareness. Even if you already have a small yet devoted following in some parts of the US,

"With our support, brands can start selling in the US market with minimal set-up fees, paying only for the logistics capacity they use. This gives our brand partners the best of both worlds: unlocking the US market without the traditional cost barriers."

- Erik Janssen Steenberg, Business Development Director , Bleckmann

expanding beyond that core group will be difficult. You're going to need to invest to get your name out there. E-commerce marketplaces offer a strategic leg-up. Household names such as Macy's and Nordstrom have thriving online e-commerce marketplaces with millions of regular customers. Getting listed on one of these carefully curated 'digital department stores', alongside big-name brands, already puts your brand in a favourable position in customers' eyes. Indeed, such a prestigious placement can provide the encouragement that convinces a new customer to give you a try.

And there's no shortage of demand for European brands. In fact, according to research published in the Europe 500 2025 report by Brand Finance, US customers have a very positive impression of European brands. They view them as more 'stylish' (33% vs 23%), more 'luxurious' (30% vs 18%) and a 'greater symbol of success' (26% vs 19%) than homegrown alternatives.[2] This attitude is reflected in the many stories of European brands that have successfully transitioned to the States. For example, Denmark-based fashion label Ganni (and Bleckmann client) has made the US one of its most important international markets, with its highest number of total stores per country. Likewise, the US is proving to be a powerful growth engine for activewear brand (also a Bleckmann client) Gymshark.[3]

Taken together, the signs point to the power of the American consumer in elevating the growth of European brands. But many questions still remain about the best route to establish a presence in this potentially lucrative market. For the past two years, our Global Bridge partnership has been answering these questions for many of our clients.

SCALABLE GROWTH THROUGH PAY-AS-YOU-SELL™

With Global Bridge, a cross-border online B2B platform, we're helping brands overcome two of the biggest obstacles to US expansion: risk and cost. Through our strategic partnership, we support brands to go live in the US without the typical start-up costs, such as setting up a US legal entity and leasing warehousing space. "Our goal is to give brands a low-risk US launchpad," explains Erik Janssen Steenberg, Business Development Director at Bleckmann. "It's a unique pay-as-you-sell model, so you really only pay for the capacity you use when products are sold. This removes the pressure of 'what if we're not a hit right away?', and that's a game-changer."

With seamless IT integrations and preferential freight rates, brands can benefit from streamlined access to over 400 premium marketplaces around the world. There's also just a single IT onboarding, eliminating the often months-long process of moving to new marketplaces. "With the single-point-of-entry setup, you can be more agile in your marketplace growth," continues Erik. "That way, if there's another marketplace that matches your brand's demographics, you can easily get started there to widen your reach." And as marketplaces continue to grow in popularity among online shoppers, with 'social commerce' platforms broadening the field, this can give you a competitive edge.

BULK SHIPPING RATES AND STREAMLINED CUSTOMS

Despite these benefits, many European brands will still be hesitant to enter the US marketplace arena given the current trade conditions. That's why the Global Bridge solution is

LOWER BARRIERS

Consolidated shipping, customs support and shared logistics capacity help growing brands access the US without heavy upfront investment.

designed to reduce costs and complexity at every stage. By offering end-to-end warehousing and logistics, we can provide access to economies of scale that are traditionally only available to enterprise-scale brands. "Typically, lower shipping rates are only offered to established brands that regularly ship substantial volumes," says Erik. "We get around that by consolidating thousands of orders from different brands into single shipments, so we can offer much more competitive rates, even if you're only shipping a few hundred items. It's another way we're helping to lower the barrier to entry."

At the same time, customs management is likely to be a major concern for brands eyeing the US market as a potential growth lever. This is where end-to-end support can make a big difference. The nightmare scenario is if packages arriving from Europe to the US are held up at customs due to unpaid duties. This could mean falling foul of a particular marketplace's service level agreements (SLAs), resulting in your brand getting suspended from that marketplace and forcing you to put your US ambitions on ice. A key prevention tool here is integrated customs management. "If your logistics provider also handles customs, they'll know your business much better," adds Erik. "This means they can address customs challenges more proactively and respond to issues more quickly."

END-TO-END LOGISTICS, STRATEGIC OVERSIGHT

One additional pain point that may be on brands' radar is returns. Here, the value of our global warehousing network specifically comes into play. Since we have a growing warehousing footprint in the US, we can handle returns in-country, so they don't have to be shipped all the way back to Europe. Some brands are even choosing to proactively hold stock at our sites in the US for even quicker delivery times. "As we all know, optimising the customer experience is vital to determining whether that one click on an e-commerce marketplace becomes a loyal customer," says Erik. "If you already have stock in the US, you're talking about shipping times similar to domestic players – it's often a deal-maker."

Beyond the infrastructure backbone, it's crucial to consider how you will evolve your marketplace strategy, and to do that, you need comprehensive strategic oversight. That's why one of the most important elements for our clients is the insights we provide as part of the marketplace package. Brands receive detailed analytics covering all their marketplace activities so they can assess and optimise their approach. Product Information Management, data mapping and inventory management are also all taken care of as part of the solution, so brands can fully focus on their core activities. "From inventory levels to sell-through, you need to know exactly how your brand is performing on each marketplace so you can make the biggest impact," Erik adds. "More than just a shipping solution, we're working with Global Bridge to provide a complete toolbox for brands to accelerate their international expansion."

A final advantage of the solution is the team's direct connections with the marketplaces themselves. "Through regular meetings with the participating platforms, we can showcase the partner brands we work with, helping to identify the best potential matches between marketplace and product," concludes Erik. "And with the number of platforms we work with set to more than triple in 2026 – including prominent marketplaces in the UK and EU – it's an opportunity that's worth learning more about."

ONE TABLE CONVERSATIONS

Small groups. Real talk. Brands swap practical lessons on returns, transport and customs—without the filters of a standard corporate event.

Images courtesy of Bleckmann

Why Spain? *Your second hub*

How a dual-hub model can drive operational efficiency for European fashion brands

The Benelux region is well known as a central hub for European fashion logistics with its excellent infrastructure, strategic location and high concentration of logistics expertise. In parallel, Spain is proving to be a valuable logistics base in southern Europe. But rather than having to choose between these two, some brands are realising the benefits of a complementary approach – with a main hub in the Benelux region and another hub in Spain. This dual-hub model enables brands to serve customers across Europe more effectively and unlocks key operational efficiencies.

THE SOUTHERN EUROPEAN LOGISTICS OPPORTUNITY

Imagine you're a Benelux-based fashion brand with a growing customer base in countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal. Where do you base your logistics operation to serve them most effectively? For many brands, the answer is increasingly Spain – a country that has established itself as a major logistics base for European fashion. Zaragoza is a prime example: over the last 10 years, the city in northeast Spain has become one of southern Europe's most important logistics hubs thanks to its geography, infrastructure investment and major brands moving in.

Fernando Sainz Martinez-Vara de Rey, Business Development Director at Bleckmann in Spain, has witnessed this growth firsthand – and it's representative more broadly of Spain's 'triple-threat' advantage from an operational perspective: it's a strategic inbound gateway, it offers faster-than-expected fulfilment across Europe and it has the dedicated fashion and lifestyle expertise to ensure no compromise is necessary on service standards. "More and more brands are recognising the strategic potential of Spain as a logistics hub," he explains. "From increasing operational resilience to improving cost competitiveness, there's a reason it's a growing trend."

WHY RUN YOUR LOGISTICS FROM SPAIN? FIVE POWERFUL ADVANTAGES

STRATEGIC INBOUND GATEWAY

- Major ports – such as Valencia, Barcelona, Castellón, Bilbao and Algeciras – handle a significant share of European sea freight. Spain's Mediterranean location enables direct connectivity with Asia, the Americas and North Africa.
- Strong air freight capacity across multiple cargo airports – including Barcelona-El Prat, Zaragoza and Vitoria – adds essential air freight capability to complement the port network.
- For brands sourcing globally, this means goods can enter the European supply chain quickly, cost-effectively and with minimal transhipment.

OUTBOUND DISTRIBUTION HUB

- Direct road connections to Europe's most important transport corridors place key cities within one to two days' trucking distance. As Fernando notes: "Spain is closer to the rest of Europe than many people think".
- 70% of Spain's GDP sits within a 350km radius of Zaragoza, including Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao, enabling streamlined access to a valuable and growing southern European market.
- Spain is ideally situated on two of the nine EU priority multimodal corridors: the Atlantic Corridor (connecting Spain, Portugal, France and Germany) and the Mediterranean Corridor (running from the Iberian Peninsula along the Mediterranean coast through France and northern Italy to central Europe).

INCREASED OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE

- A dual-hub model reduces dependency on a single northern European gateway, improving business continuity.
- Greater flexibility during peak trading periods – distributing load across two hubs can be the difference between meeting demand and falling short.
- Mitigates risk of disruption due to port congestion, extreme weather or geopolitical pressures on key trade routes.

MATURE EU BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

- Decades of infrastructure investment in roads, rail, ports and logistics platforms have created a network that operates to consistently high standards.
- Deep integration into European logistics frameworks means predictable regulatory conditions and established carrier relationships.
- For brands evaluating where to expand their logistics footprint, Spain offers the confidence of a well-established, stable operating environment.

COST COMPETITIVENESS

- Warehousing, land, labour and operational expansion costs are all lower than in the Benelux region or Germany, creating a compelling case for brands looking to improve their cost efficiency.
- Over time, the lower operating costs of a Spanish hub can translate into a meaningfully better cost-per-unit-shipped for southern European distribution – an advantage that grows in line with volume.
- Importantly, cost efficiency comes with no compromise on quality; Spain has a well-developed logistics talent pool and a mature provider landscape fully capable of meeting the service standards that fashion brands require.

WHY A COMPLEMENTARY HUB CAN BE A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

Spain's leading position in the European logistics network is well established – and increasingly hard to overlook for brands. Zaragoza, for example, sits on the Mediterranean Core Network Corridor, a key trans-European transport axis that runs from the Iberian Peninsula along the Mediterranean coastlines of Spain and France, through the Alps and northern Italy, and onwards through Slovenia, Croatia and Hungary into central Europe. This puts northeast Spain at the intersection of southern European demand and continent-wide distribution. The brands that have set up shop there speak for themselves: Amazon, Adidas, Decathlon and Inditex all operate in the region, benefitting from its combination of strong infrastructure and excellent reach. The area's consistent growth is exemplified by the Plataforma Logística de Zaragoza (PLAZA). At over 13 million square metres, it's the largest logistics platform in southern Europe. In fact, Harvard Business School published a case study on why Zaragoza rivalled Rotterdam as a logistics hub.[1]

That infrastructure becomes particularly valuable when you consider that many fashion brands are managing more than one distribution model in parallel. Take the difference between serving northern and southern European markets: different customer expectations, different seasonal rhythms and different delivery lead times. Or consider the difference between full-price retail and outlet – with distinct logistics requirements, different distribution footprints and different measures of success. Running both models through a single hub may mean making some operational compromises.

FLEXIBLE GROWTH

Building a second hub in Spain can unlock faster fulfilment, localised returns and room to scale with demand.

A complementary hub in Spain gives brands the operational flexibility to run these models on their own terms, with each hub optimised for the flows handled there.

FROM DECISION TO GO-LIVE: THE JOURNEY TO A SECOND HUB

For fashion brands that operate both full-price retail and outlet channels, separating the two logistically can be a smart approach, and it's a good illustration of the dual-hub advantage. For one European fashion brand, that thinking led to a straightforward question: could selected stock be fulfilled from Spain, independently of its other operation? The answer was yes – and the journey from taking that decision to starting a live operation in Spain took just three months.

That timeline may sound surprising, since opening a second hub is often assumed to be a lengthy and time-consuming endeavour. Systems integrations, warehouse fit-out, staff recruitment, process design, testing: the list of things to be done feels long before anyone has even drawn up a project plan. However, with the right preparation and the right partner with a dedicated warehousing footprint, that complexity can be managed more efficiently than most expect.

The three-month timeline covered the full operational scope: integrations, warehouse setup and process design. “Brands expect it to take much longer,” continued Fernando, “but it doesn't have to. And the go-live itself is not the finish line – the weeks after launch, when real volumes are running and you can measure performance against reality rather than projections, are often where the most valuable optimisation happens. That's key to building a solid growth platform.”

FOR FLEXIBLE GROWTH, TWO HUBS CAN BE BETTER THAN ONE

A well-designed secondary distribution hub in Spain, integrated into a brand's omnichannel fulfilment strategy, can unlock both operational efficiency and customer experience benefits. On the operational side, stock positioned closer to southern European demand centres means reduced cross-continent shipping, faster fulfilment times and smarter inventory positioning for agility. For customers, this results in tangible improvements: shorter delivery windows, more responsive service and localised returns handling – the kind of experience that builds loyalty in key markets that are continuing to grow in importance for many European fashion brands.[2]

But of course, serving your customers across the whole of Europe more effectively also means having the operational capacity to expand in line with demand. Cities like Zaragoza, and the Spanish logistics network more widely, have been well-invested with the infrastructure to support that ambition – and the right partner will bring not just warehousing capacity but a broader range of value-added services, from repairs and quality control to product renewal, tailored to the brand's needs. “The smart approach is to build in agility from the start as your requirements will evolve over time,” concludes Fernando. “The brands that plan for flexibility from the beginning are the ones that get the most out of setting up a second hub in Spain.”

PREMIUM SERVICE

Faster delivery, local returns and full fulfilment visibility help Flabelus protect its premium customer experience.

Images courtesy of Flabelus

Flabelus: *Best foot forward*

How local UK fulfilment is helping Flabelus scale with speed, visibility and service quality

Over the past half-decade, premium footwear label Flabelus has built a reputation for putting quality first – both in the production of its iconic handcrafted espadrille-inspired designs (mostly made at its factory in Elche, Spain) and its customer interactions. The strategy has driven impressive growth, with 31 owned stores now operating globally and designs available at over 700 locations worldwide. Having identified the UK as a priority growth market, the brand needed a specialised logistics partner to meet its operational requirements and match its passion for delivering a consistently sparkling experience.

AUTHENTIC STYLE, SEAMLESSLY DELIVERED

Previously managing all UK sales from Spain, Flabelus had faced growing complexity in cross-border customs, returns management and supply chain oversight. As demand in the UK increased, the brand needed a flexible fulfilment infrastructure to help it reduce lead times and scale in line with its expansion – without compromising the customer experience. "Prioritising the customer at every stage has been central to our growth, and we hold our partners to the same exacting standard," says María Fernándes-Álva de Zunzunegui, Global Operations Director at Flabelus. "Bleckmann has demonstrated the ideal balance of logistical expertise and commitment to service excellence."

BUILT FOR SPEED, VISIBILITY AND QUALITY

All of Flabelus' UK omnichannel orders are now fulfilled from Bleckmann's distribution centre in Burton-on-Trent, strategically situated in the UK's 'golden logistics triangle' in the Midlands region. This enables faster fulfilment times to both e-commerce and retail customers through an extensive network of 'Local Hero' last-mile partners. The operation is fully integrated with Flabelus' order management system – combining orders from owned and marketplace e-commerce together with those from brick-and-mortar stores. This gives Flabelus full oversight of the entire fulfilment cycle, from outbound to returns, so every customer touchpoint can reflect the brand's premium positioning.

NAVIGATING CUSTOMS COMPLEXITY

Maintaining operational efficiency amid post-Brexit customs requirements demanded specialised support. For example, EU-origin goods (such as Flabelus' products) entering the UK can qualify for zero-tariff treatment under the Trade Cooperation Agreement (TCA) – but only if the importer can provide valid proof-of-origin documentation. With the brand's end-to-end compliance requirements managed by our customs teams, we can ensure that the right documentation is always available. "We help them process everything in the best and fastest possible way," adds Fernando. "What makes this particularly joined-up is that we have customs expertise on both sides of the Channel, so rather than managing it from one side, we can deliver a more integrated approach."

Another area where moving fulfilment operations to the UK drove cost-efficiency benefits was returns and exchanges. Sending returns from the UK back to the EU brought with it cost and administrative hurdles, with customs duties due on each cross-border movement. Now that Flabelus maintains inventory in-country in the UK, this problem has been eliminated, streamlining the process. "Returns can be one of the most difficult-to-handle aspects of any brand's supply chain," continues Fernando. "Our expertise in managing the entire returns process for fashion and lifestyle brands means we're well equipped to make it as smooth and customer-centric as possible. Returned items are now inspected, sorted and returned to stock at Burton-on-Trent, which not only reduces compliance costs but also means that customers get refunds or exchanges quicker."

Images courtesy of Flabelus

CUSTOMS CLARITY

Integrated customs support helps Flabelus reduce cross-border complexity and keep UK operations moving smoothly.

UNBURDENING AMBITIOUS BRANDS TO FOCUS ON GROWTH

For brands operating across markets, removing the obstacles to growth is a priority. And as trade complexity continues to add friction, an efficient fulfilment solution tailored to your brand's needs can underpin a smooth ramp-up. This starts with getting the fundamentals right. Our onboarding process is built around a proven sequence – from kick-off and gathering requirements, through systems integration and testing to go-live. It's all part of our commitment to full operational coverage from day one. By the time the first orders start flowing, every process has been stress-tested and every system properly connected, spanning customs clearance, warehousing, last-mile delivery and returns. This end-to-end oversight minimises the potential of disruptions to derail growth.

As with all our clients, building a complete picture of operational and strategic needs was key to creating a solid foundation for a future-proof partnership. This meant working together to ensure future growth could be accommodated. Warehousing capacity at Burton-on-Trent has been structured to scale alongside Flabelus' expansion in the UK – with flexible space and support that can meet the most demanding seasonal peaks and expand long-term. "Fast-growing brands need a partner who can manage the full picture so they can keep their focus firmly on growth," concludes Fernando. "The brand is now well placed to continue expanding its UK presence without having to deal with the operational and administrative hurdles that normally come with an ambitious trajectory."

Flabelus: Best foot forward

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