

# Block One Automation Runs First Unmanned Robotic Shift at Del Papa Distributing

*Texas-based beverage distributor achieves unmanned robotic overnight picking and palletizing using Block One's Pallet Factory™.*

FORT COLLINS, CO, UNITED STATES, December 29, 2025 /

EINPresswire.com/ -- Del Papa Distributing is now running robots in its beer warehouse overnight, completing a fully unmanned third shift that sorts, picks, and palletizes customer orders using [Block One Automation](#)'s Pallet Factory™.

This is not a pilot or demonstration. The robotic operation has been live in production for several weeks, continuing to run unattended after daytime warehouse activity ends.

Once daytime picking winds down, Del Papa stages replenishment, loads connection points, and clears the warehouse floor. From that point forward, the facility continues operating without a staffed picking crew.

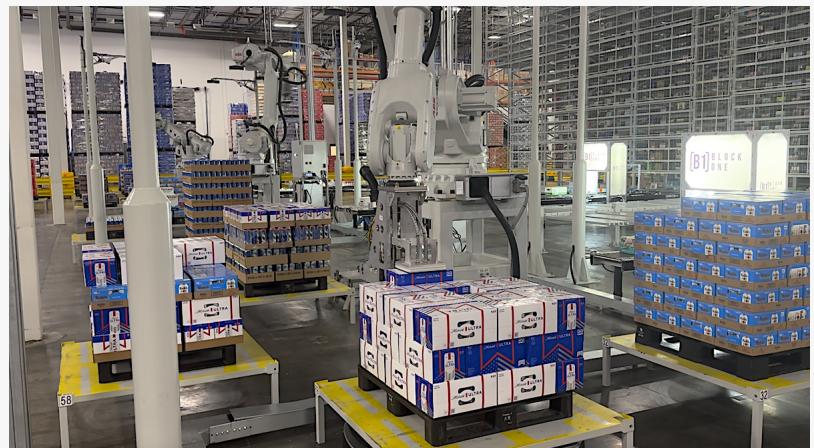
"The fact that we can truly set it and forget it is exciting," said Eric Joseph, Vice President of Operations at Del Papa Distributing. "Seeing the system run unattended through the night is a major milestone for us."

Daytime shifts had already been operating with automation and reduced staffing prior to the overnight deployment.

Following go-live, Del Papa observed strong performance metrics, including a peak hourly rate of 828 cases picked, an average throughput of 660 cases per hour, and combined picking and



Unmanned warehouse operating Block One's Pallet Factory™ at Del Papa Distributing



Robotic arms palletize mixed SKU orders

“

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replenishment peaks reaching 836 cases per hour.

Del Papa’s move toward automation was driven by rising SKU counts, a challenge facing beverage distributors industry-wide. To manage this growing complexity, the company projected approximately one million additional cases shifting into its Texas City operation as part of a

cross-docking strategy designed to relieve SKU congestion at its Beaumont and Victoria facilities.

“We knew the volume was coming,” Joseph said. “We needed a system that could handle increased demand without adding a large amount of human labor.”

Rather than waiting for new construction to be completed, Del Papa deployed Block One’s modular automation within its existing footprint while a 92,000-square-foot warehouse expansion proceeds in parallel. This approach allowed the operation to begin capturing the benefits of automation immediately, while positioning the team to transition smoothly into expanded, autonomous operations once construction is complete.

“We didn’t blink at the investment once we saw what the installation would give us,” said Steve Holtsclaw, Vice President of Technology Solutions & Integration at Del Papa Distributing. “Large, fixed conveyor systems can become outdated in a few years. Robotics are agile—we started with Phase One, we’re adding Phase Two, and the system continues to evolve as our needs change.”

Block One’s Pallet Factory™ differs from traditional warehouse automation by combining robotic arms, autonomous mobile robots, and dense storage systems under a single Warehouse Execution System (WES). The platform orchestrates workflow, balances throughput, and manages operational exceptions—capabilities required to support unattended operation.

“Hardware matters, but software is crucial,” said Jonathan O’Neil, Founder of Block One Automation. “Without orchestration, automation still depends on people being present. We keep a little light on for the cameras, but otherwise the warehouse runs on its own.”

Del Papa evaluated multiple automation providers before selecting Block One, citing modular deployment, cost efficiency, and the ability to materially reduce physical labor.

“Other systems still required a significant human labor component,” Holtsclaw said. “This one actually reduces that dependency—and that mattered to us.”

Del Papa is now progressing into Phase Two of its automation rollout, expanding robotic capacity while construction on the facility’s warehouse expansion continues.

"Del Papa reached a fully autonomous shift ahead of schedule," said TJ Wisthoff, Director of Robotics Sales at Block One Automation. "The system delivers accurate picking, manages operational exceptions, reduces breakage and shrink, and absorbs daily volume fluctuations without increasing labor costs."

"Unmanned operations are no longer theoretical for beverage distribution," said Travis Lee, Head of Marketing at Block One Automation. "They are working, affordable, and outperforming manual labor. What we've deployed with Del Papa is not a future concept—it's a model for modern beverage distributors."

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