

John Meale, Managing Director of market-leading loading & unloading equipment specialists, [Thorworld Industries Ltd](#) , says spending time to choose well designed and properly manufactured quality loading bay and materials handling equipment can pay dividends in making the goods in/out process more efficient, more cost-effective and even safer.

The loading bay is a vital link in the production and distribution chain. If the loading system fails, goods cannot be despatched or received, causing knock-on delays in the production/distribution cycle. Choosing the right supplier and equipment is therefore crucially important in ensuring trouble free operation - minimising costly downtime and maximising productivity.

So what do you need to consider when looking for loading and unloading equipment? The following pointers should serve as a helpful guide to choosing the right loading bay and materials handling equipment, accessories and safety aids.

Talk to well-known and established suppliers whose experienced sales engineers should fully understand your needs and who will help you achieve a continuing drive for increased efficiency by supplying products which fully meet your specific requirements - both short and longer-term.

It's also worth checking if they are members of an appropriate trade or industry association. My own company is an active member of the Association of Loading & Elevating Equipment Manufacturers (ALEM), which itself operates under the auspices of the British Materials Handling Federation (BMHF).

After the sales engineer has suggested a specific product or group of products, ask for details of existing users. You can then talk to them direct, or possibly visit one or more together with the potential supplier to see the equipment in action and to check on customer satisfaction levels.

It's often worth considering a single-source supplier, such as Thorworld, who can provide all your main loading and unloading equipment requirements, together with the necessary accessories – particularly if they have the relevant experience and a proven track record in the sector, as well as offering the vitally important after-sales service and maintenance facility.

Make sure all the equipment suggested by suppliers or manufacturers is produced under strict quality controls that ensure the highest European health and safety standards.

It's worth remembering that an estimated 25 per cent of factory and warehouse accidents occur in and around the loading bay. High levels of personnel and mechanical traffic, often combined with a low appreciation of the risks involved, mean that loading bays can, potentially, be extremely hazardous places in which to work.

BSI registered, with CE mark certification, Thorworld has been ISO 9002 accredited since 1992 and was one of the first in the industry to achieve the latest ISO international quality management standard.

It's a fact that an increasing quantity of materials handling equipment that does not carry the official CE mark or meet European quality and safety standards and legislation is now coming into the country, particularly from Eastern Europe and Asia.

For example, I have seen a new loading ramp made in Eastern Europe that was totally unsafe to use. In my view, the ramp, which did not have the CE mark, was a major health and safety hazard.

Using inferior materials handling and loading bay equipment could pose a threat to the health and safety of your personnel. So before you buy, always double check with the supplier that all their equipment is CE marked and has been made to EU quality, design and safety standards; don't just assume it has been.

It really is a false economy to buy 'cheap' substitutes if they are not totally safe to use, as an inferior product could lead to a serious accident and won't generally provide a satisfactory or

lengthy working life.

You also need to be confident that the supplier can offer a fast and reliable maintenance or replacement service, should something go wrong with the equipment. You cannot afford to have extensive and expensive downtime because of a breakdown or damage.

If the need is temporary, perhaps seasonal, there are significant financial benefits to be had by renting rather than buying some forms of loading equipment. As rental can be paid from income, companies can save precious capital for other expenditure.

Through our specialist RentARamp operation we provide high quality mobile yardramps, available for purchase or rental on a sale or return basis, which are ideal for loading and unloading vehicle trailers by fork truck where there are no suitable raised loading bays.

Talking your problems through with an experienced and respected supplier can often lead to an unexpected solution to a loading bay requirement.

For example, when considering the installation of an extra loading dock at its distribution complex in Manchester, Brother (UK) Ltd had to take into account the cost of buying an additional fork lift truck as well as the associated civil engineering work.

After speaking to us about the situation we suggested that putting in one of our Truckloada mobile yardlifts would maximise the facilities, whilst at the same time achieving financial economies. As the outside area in front of the new loading bay's roller shutter doors was on an incline, using the Truckloada meant there was no need to level the ground.

According to Brother (UK) Ltd's Head of Logistics, Keith Howe, the Truckloada has enabled them to save on costs as well as delivering considerable health and safety benefits, providing a simple and economic solution to the problem.

Additionally, loading large grass cutting machines onto low loaders at leading groundcare equipment distributor Lely (UK) Ltd has been made quicker and easier with a purpose-designed Thorworld mobile yard ramp.

Lely (UK) Transport Manager, Kevin Morgan, said: "The Thorworld ramp has made us much more efficient and I was impressed with their technical expertise."

And for KAB Seating, a world renowned manufacturer of seating systems, cost efficiencies and improved safety were achieved from the creation of a bespoke Thorworld modular loading dock system, together with the provision of various loading dock accessories.

KAB Facilities Engineer, Brian Bateman, said: "With the Thorworld modular loading dock system, the loading of containers has been made much more efficient, without the need for the previous two-man operation. It's also safer for our despatch staff and with the resulting cost savings, payback should be achieved in one year."

Thorworld Industries Ltd, which will celebrate its 30th anniversary in 2011, was established by John Meale, a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Logistics & Transport (FCILT), a member of the Institution of Engineering & Technology (IET), past President of the Association of Loading & Elevating Equipment Manufacturers (ALEM), former President of the BMHF, and now the newly elected President of FEM (the European Materials Handling Federation), as well as heading up its Elevating and Loading Equipment Product Group.

The company is firmly established as a market-leading designer, manufacturer and supplier of a wide range of top quality loading & unloading equipment and loading bay accessories, such as mobile yardramps, dock shelters & seals, dock levellers, modular loading docks, dock plates & boards, dock & vehicle bumpers, wheel chocks, vehicle restraints, Truckloada mobile yardlifts, Dockloada scissor lift platforms, and a choice of walk, fixed and wheelchair access ramps, together with a comprehensive selection of safety and protection accessories, to help ensure safe, efficient, profitable working and the protection of vehicles, plant and personnel.

John Meale summarised: "To bring about improved efficiencies and increased cost savings in and around the loading bay it pays to do your homework. Always talk to established experts in the industry before leaping in and buying equipment that may not be right or safe for the job."

And remember that 'cheap' products more often than not cost far more in the end."