



Alex Stevens of Opex

Alex Stevens is vice president at Opex, a Moorestown, New Jersey-based provider of warehouse automation and document management systems. Stevens has worked in the material handling and supply chain industry for the past eight years and has developed a deep knowledge of automation technologies, specifically goods-to-person and automated sorting solutions. In his current role, he oversees product development, research and development, customer solutions, and service and support for Opex's warehouse automation business. Stevens holds a degree in business from Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

In our continuing series of discussions with top supply-chain company executives, Alex Stevens of Opex discusses robotic automation technology and career opportunities in material handling.

Q: HOW DO YOU VIEW THE STATE OF THE WAREHOUSE AUTOMATION MARKET FOR 2021?

A: Booming. The pandemic has accelerated the megatrends that were already developing across the retail and e-commerce sectors. Companies have also realized they need to supplement their labor force with automation in order to meet their customers' expectations.

Q: WHAT ATTRACTED YOU TO A CAREER IN MATERIAL HANDLING?

A: For me, it was an evolution from another industry. Opex has always grown by developing new technologies in existing markets or applying current technologies to new markets. Warehouse automation was the perfect market in which to do the latter. We had developed a breakthrough robotic mail-sorting technology in Mail Matrix that we were able to scale up and then transition into the warehouse automation market. Using this base, we were able to develop the first goods-to-person solution with bots moving both horizontally and vertically.

It has been exciting to see the industry grow and change over the last eight years, and I'm excited to see it continue growing and evolving.

Q: WHAT CHANGES HAVE YOU SEEN IN THE MATERIAL HANDLING MARKET DURING YOUR TIME IN THE INDUSTRY?

A: The technologies are much more advanced and, surprisingly, much more accessible. End-customers' expectations and demands have changed and continue to push us to develop quicker, more flexible solutions to meet their needs.

Q: HOW HAS THE PANDEMIC CHANGED YOUR CUSTOMERS' DISTRIBUTION OPERATIONS?

A: The pandemic has increased demand for so many of our cus-

tomers, and at the same time, they are faced with the challenge of operating in a Covid-safe manner. Automation helps decrease the number of employees needed to complete a given task. Our solutions also minimize the need for workers to travel through a warehouse, which helps reduce the risks of in-person contact.

Q: ARE YOU SEEING MORE INTEREST IN AUTOMATION TECHNOLOGIES OR AN ACCELERATION OF PLANNED PROJECTS?

A: 2020 was an interesting year, and interest in automation has surged. Since Opex is vertically integrated, we have had to add capacity to our manufacturing and production facilities to keep up with demand. Not only are our customers interested in implementing automation, but they are also pushing us to continue to shorten our leadtimes and project implementation schedules.

Q: WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO ANOTHER YOUNG PROFESSIONAL CONSIDERING A CAREER IN THE MATERIAL HANDLING INDUSTRY?

A: Go for it. This is an amazing industry to be in right now and will continue to grow for decades. Starting a career in the material handling industry will be a great platform for your future growth, whether you stay in the field or your career evolves in such a way that you end up elsewhere. □