

# Tharsus spin-out VersaTile to storm warehousing market with £8m investment

A newly established robotics firm in Blyth is hoping to capture a share of the warehousing market following an £8m seed investment from its parent group.

VersaTile Automation is part of £77m-turnover Tharsus Group and has developed an AI-based system for high intensity fulfilment centres. The firm's "intelligent floor" knows where goods are and can transport them instantly using a moving tile setup which is said to require only half the space of traditional warehouse systems.

The technology has been developed by engineers in Blyth and bosses now have ambitions to sell internationally, making VersaTile a significant employer in the town. An initial three-year deal with UK logistics name Wincanton has seen the tech installed in its high-volume Northampton eFulfilment centre.

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VersaTile is led by Tharsus boss Joni Rautavuori and is now looking to the ecommerce, retail and grocery sectors, where it hopes to shake-up warehousing operations. The technology is said to respond to unpredictable changes in real time via self-learning capabilities, and can be installed into facilities without changes needed to existing infrastructure.

The team says it can drastically improve "pick and

presentation rates” meaning orders can be picked in minutes. The technology is modular and is set up with a simple API for integration.

Its launch is said to follow 15 years of development leading to the spin-out from Tharsus, which has built a reputation for automation. The Blyth business has supplied big names such as Ocado, Rolls-Royce and BMW. Last year Tharsus reported a 14.5% fall in revenue due to a tough market and a decline in legacy customer volumes.

Mr Rautavuori said: “Supply chains are under tremendous pressure to meet ever changing customer demands for shorter delivery times, higher flexibility and lower cost in a sustainable manner. Lack of the productivity development and availability of labour is adding to this challenge particularly in UK.

“Current warehouse operations are creaking under the pressure and warehouse employees are under greater strain than ever. VersaTile’s solution uses advanced technology to solve this. Having Wincanton, a leading supply chain company in the UK, as our first customer shows the credibility of VersaTile technology and the trust in our experienced team behind it.”

Paul Durkin, chief customer and innovation officer at Wincanton: “Wincanton is accelerating the adoption of cutting-edge technology for the benefit of its customers, and our exciting investment in this innovative tote-to-person picking solution from Versatile Automation will transform productivity and efficiency in our shared user eFulfilment operations.”