

32 Years of Growth

During the last 32 years, the CC Container has become the standard distribution unit for pot plants all over Europe. Supplemented with a range of services, the CC Container is now introduced to new markets in the USA, Central America and Asia for import to Europe.

by Lotte Bjarke

This is not a new story. In fact, the story about the CC Container is 32 years old. Yet the company behind the CC Container, Container Centralen A/S, has news for the horticultural industry worldwide. The CC Container itself is still the same as it was 32 years ago, but the service concepts connected to the CC Container have developed tremendously over the years.

“Everybody knows the CC Container and knows what it can do. The strength of Container Centralen is no longer just the CC Container itself. It is all the services we can provide to back up the CC system which are important. If we want to differentiate our company, we have to provide the services needed in the market – not only the option of long-term hiring,” says Tonny Vangsgaard Gravesen, chief operations officer at Container Centralen.

Welcome everywhere

Container Centralen is owned by Danish and Dutch pot plant exporters. The idea of the CC Container was born within the Danish pot plant industry in the 1970s. The dimensions were set by the size of the trucks and the height of the heating pipes in the nurseries. A simple construction that proved to be just what the industry needed. Still today, no other system has been able to optimize the volume of pot plants on a truck better than the CC Container.

But the container itself is only part of the explanation of the success of the system. “From the beginning the CC Container has been neutral, so to speak. We provide the wheels that make the products move, but apart from that we are ‘nobody’. This means that the CC Container is welcome in all nurseries and all kinds of shops, no matter the name. And that is exactly what makes it possible to exchange the containers between all players on the horticultural scene to the benefit of everybody,” underlines Vangsgaard Gravesen.

Higher efficiency with pool system

The original idea of the system was that the nursery would hire a certain amount of CC Containers on a long-term contract. The nursery would deliver the plants to the wholesaler or exporter on the container, and he would distribute it to the retailer from where the container would return to the nursery for new plants.

The development of IT in combination with a strong depot network in Europe made it possible to take the system to a new level. The depots are located strategically all over Europe, and it is possible to ship plants from one corner of Europe to another without having to bring the empty CC Containers back. Instead, the containers are left at the nearest depot, and the truck can drive back with something else instead of having to make the trip empty. Twenty-four hours after a CC Container has arrived at a CC depot, a new container is released to the nursery – often at a different depot. Shipping the containers back to the starting point, usually took more than 24 hours, so the result is much more efficiency in the entire system.

Container Centralen now has 28 big A-depots and 110 minor B-depots distributed all over Europe. “It is our job to think about the complete supply chain. We want to help all the players to think about the flow of products all through the distribution chain. This is how we can all optimize the process and thus become more competitive in all links of the chain,” says Vangsgaard Gravesen. He underlines that the whole idea of CC Pool System is that no returnable transport item should ever have to travel empty.

New collection service

The successful introduction of the CC Pool System led to a new idea, which has been tested in France and Poland over the past couple of years. Container Centralen is now ready to introduce the CC Collection Service in more European markets. “We can now offer to pick up the empty containers for our clients at the point of sales and take them back to our depots. As soon as we have picked up the container, a new one is released for their disposal. So you can save time and worries about missing containers etc.,” explains Vangsgaard Gravesen, emphasising that the retailers are very interested in the CC Collection Service as well.

“Earlier, the outlet might receive deliveries from five different distributors who would all come back for the empty containers. If you let us handle the collections, the outlets only have to deal with one truck in their loading and unloading areas. This is a big advantage to the outlets,” he says. He expects that the outlets are likely to put pressure on the nurseries to use this kind of service agreements in the future. So far, more than 3,000 outlets in France now use the collection service from Container Centralen. Tonny Vangsgaard Gravesen foresees that the future CC Collection Service will not only manage CC Containers or other products of Container Centralen, but also other returnable transport items as well as waste products from the outlets.

Coming to America

So far, Container Centralen has mainly been active in the European market, but with the increased globalization of the horticultural industry the entire world market has become the working field of the company. “We are very focused on being present where things are happening. There is obviously a market in the USA, but so far there has been no standard solution for plant distribution and no pool system like the one we have in Europe. That is why we see a big potential for using our experiences and expanding in the American market,” says Vangsgaard Gravesen.

The company has chosen a different and simpler approach for the American market than the European model. Nurseries in the USA don’t sign long-term contracts to get access to CC Containers, but hire the containers they need per shipment. The CC One-Way Service implies that they can pick up the containers at the nearest CC depot, use them for their purposes, and ship them off to their clients. There, they will be picked up by Container Centralen and taken back to a CC depot.

Easy travelling – and environmentally friendly

More and more plants and young plants are being transported across the world. A fact which is of course very interesting to Container Centralen. So far this has led to activities in the Asian and Central American markets. “It is important to us to be present where the plants are grown since a lot of them are shipped to Europe. It is very practical for all parties that the plants are shipped within the system that is used at their destination. Earlier plants were shipped in sea containers equipped with one-way shelves of wood and plenty of soil. You can imagine the nightmare it is to unload a container like that. With the CC Container, you can roll the plants into the sea container in Asia or Central America, and roll it out when it arrives in Europe. It is easier, quicker, cheaper, and better for the environment,” says Vangsgaard Gravesen, who expects growing markets in Asia as well as in Central America.