

An Open and Shut Case: Drawer Storage Cabinets vs. Traditional Shelving

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Opening argument

The time has come to make a decision about your storage equipment. You have many options, but one over-riding important decision you need to make is whether to go with drawer storage cabinets or traditional shelving. Certainly there are items that are well served by the old stand-by, industrial shelves. But I have evidence that proves, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that for most items, and under most circumstances, your decision should fall on the side of drawer storage cabinets.

A case for full cubic space

It's likely that there are limitations to the amount of space you can devote to storage at your facility, so you certainly want to make the most of the space you have. The fact is, drawer storage cabinets are much better at making full use of your available cubic space than shelves, particularly if you are storing small-to-medium size items of irregular shape and size.

Shelving is fine for big, bulky, regularly-

shaped items – items larger than a shoebox. For example, stackable rectangular boxes can often be a nice fit for shelf space. But irregularly-shaped boxes, or items with irregular surfaces (such as most instruments), usually can not be easily stacked. Even if they are stacked, cubic space is almost always wasted, because even if they could use the full cubic air space available with shelving, most people simply don't. Moreover, people typically store popular items along the front edge of the shelf, hiding and inhibiting access to items at the back of the shelf.



Drawer cabinets, on the other hand, allow storage in right-height drawers which can be filled to the top, using all available cubic space. Be sure to look for drawers which feature full-height sidewalls. This, in conjunction with drawers having full-

extension capabilities, means that the entire three-dimensional drawer space can be utilized –

front-to-back, side-to-side, and top-to-bottom. Because of this, with small to medium items, one eye-level modular drawer cabinet can hold as much as three to four sections of shelving.

The upshot of the full use of cubic space with high-density modular drawer storage is a maximized use of overall available floor space. Consider what your company is paying for every square foot of storage space. Since three to four shelf units have about the same storage capacity as one cabinet, a switch to drawer cabinet storage can reduce needed square footage by as much as 100% - 400%. And space = money.

A key witness: Corporate Jet Support

Corporate Jet Support (CJS) of Moonachie, NJ is a leading wholesale supplier of Gulfstream aircraft parts. Recently the company's unmitigated



success was creating a potentially debilitating problem in their storage warehouse.

Simply put, says CJS owner, Chris Breitweiser, "We ran out of room. We had grown out of our existing storage space and were forced to contemplate

either moving or expanding our warehouse through expensive construction."

The problem, as it turned out, was not one of insufficient storage space – the available 10,000 square feet was more than adequate. The problem was a storage system that was not making the best use of the available space. CJS was rely-

ing on antiquated, conventional shelving and pallets to store its wide range of fast-moving aircraft parts.

CJS and Breitweiser purchased a full squadron of 250 shallow depth HS modular drawer storage cabinets from Lista, as well as two Lista Storage Wall® Systems. CJS captured 10 feet of vertical space by stacking two high density HS cabinets atop each other. Lista custom-configured the HS drawer interiors using its flexible, modular dividing and partitioning accessories to accommodate the items CJS would be storing – everything from small washers to valves, generators and actuators.

Explained Breitweiser, "We were able to maximize the use of our warehouse height and maintain the flexibility to put thousands of items in a very limited area.

We can now hold in one drawer what we previously were storing in three units of conventional shelving."



Order in the drawers

Drawer interiors, with their easily customizable compartments, are ideally suited for storing small loose items like nuts, bolts, washers, spark plugs, electrical components and small instruments. These drawer compartments protect the items stored within them, can precisely match stored items by height, width and depth, are easily bar code labeled, and provide direct access and viewing.

On the other hand, the industry standard way of storing these smaller items on shelves is to use a shelving bin, plastic box, or even worse, an open or semi-open cardboard box. The plastic boxes and shelving bins are not inexpensive. In fact, 10 or 20 boxes can equal the cost of the shelving unit itself, doubling your storage equipment costs.

The boxes and bins are also impractical in terms of seeing and accessing the items you're storing. The standard industrial shelf is typically 87" high, with the top one or two shelves over a standing individual's head. Therefore, seeing what is stored in the upper shelves is



impossible without a ladder. And accessing the items is at best difficult, and at worst, dangerous – especially if you're using the previously mentioned semi-opened cardboard boxes which can easily spill their contents from a precarious upper shelf perch.

Speaking of precarious perches, there are certainly ergonomic advantages for employees working with modular drawer storage. Just as there is no reaching high for items on upper shelves, access to items stored near the floor is also much improved. When items are stored on the bottom shelf of a shelving unit, employees can find themselves on their hands and knees, awkwardly reaching for items and potentially straining backs and shoulders. With full extension drawers, all items in all drawers are within easy reach.

In defense of inventory management

When you can easily see your inventory right in front of you, as is the case with modular drawer storage, inventorying items becomes a much easier and more accurate task. On your shelf, items are going to get moved around, shifting away from assigned homes. Items are much more likely to get lost on shelves, which leads to wasted inventory



and/or stock-outs. Within a highly organized modular drawer, each individual item has its own compartment and items are much less likely to get lost or mis-identified. Also, as items can be viewed from the front of the drawer to the farthest back corners, visual accounting is easy. And order picking takes much less time as well.

For added organization and easier inventory management, some manufacturers' drawers have built-in label holders, and each compartment can be labeled. At Lista, we offer a free download of a proprietary software labeling system that allows you to print SKUs, text, illustrations, and bar-codes. Shelving usually does not provide for an efficient parts location system.

Another Lista drawer storage customer, Bob Crete, Operations Manager and Parts Manager at Boston, MA's Boston Volvo Village auto dealership, uses high-density drawer storage to house small, medium and large-sized parts together and have easy access to all of them. And parts management, order picking and inventory taking have become much less daunting tasks.

"Just in one month alone," Crete said, "we moved over 18,000 pieces out of these drawers. In and out. And the process of restocking is a fraction of what it used to be. That's how you gauge the value of your equipment."

Witness improved protection and security

Modular drawer storage cabinets protect your valuable tools, parts and other assets from environmental wear and tear. Items come out of the drawer looking as clean as when they went in.

This is far from the case with shelving, with items often left out in the open where they can collect coatings of dirt, dust and grime.

Drawer storage can provide much greater security for valuable items.



Whereas shelving is by nature open and unlockable, cabinets are available with a range of locking options. Even within a locked storage room, additional locking systems on drawers can improve security and reduce shrinkage.

Evidence comes to light

Rows of shelving units can divide a room into a series of dark, uninviting corridors, blocking out light and inhibiting airflow. Drawer cabinets are not only much more attractive to begin with, keeping stored items out of sight until the drawer is open, their dimensions allow for a much better-lit storage area and improved ventilation. Better lighting and improved aesthetics can do wonders for your company's professional image. These improvements can also work to boost employee morale, creating a safe, pleasant and productivity-enhancing workspace.



Beyond the shadow of a doubt

When you weigh all the evidence, and judge the benefits of drawer storage cabinets versus shelving units, your decision is truly open and shut. Consider everything from space and cost savings to security, inventory control, lighting and aesthetics, and you will see that drawer storage cabinets are the more efficient and productive option for storing small and medium sized items. Case closed.

John Alfieri, Vice President, Sales and Marketing, at Lista International Corporation, Holliston, MA, has been in the storage industry for over 25 years. He spent over ten years in field sales, assessing customer needs and solving sticky storage problems.

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