

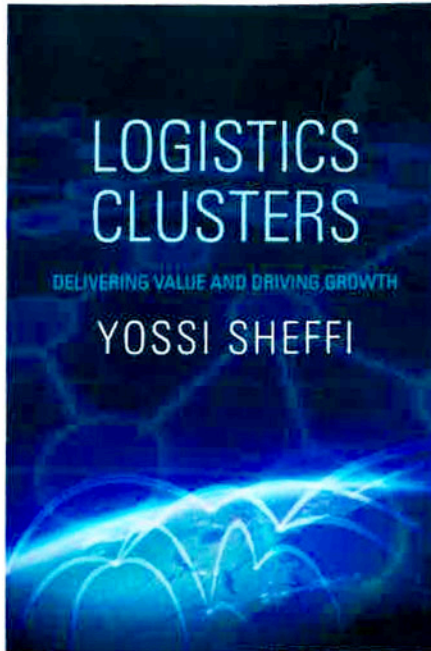
Cluster for competitive advantage

No man is an island, wrote the poet John Donne—and according to a new book by Yossi Sheffi, the same could be said of logistics operations. Sheffi, director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Center for Transportation and Logistics, believes companies gain a competitive advantage by locating their transportation and distribution operations within "logistics clusters"—geographically concentrated sets of logistics-related business activities—instead of in an isolated area.

In *Logistics Clusters: Delivering Value and Driving Growth*, Sheffi argues that logistics clusters offer a partial solution to current economic problems because they provide jobs and spark economic growth. He also contends that the clusters promote social justice by contributing to upward mobility and promoting environmental responsibility.

Using the examples of Memphis, Singapore, Chicago, Rotterdam, Los Angeles, and other locations, Sheffi outlines how logistics clusters develop and how they promote other industrial activities; the benefits of locating distribution and value-added activities in such areas; and how governments can support logistics clusters through investment, regulation, and trade policy.

The book will be published by MIT Press in October 2012. It can be pre-ordered for \$29.95 at <http://mitpress.mit.edu>. □



Fashion forward ... or safety faux pas?

One doesn't normally associate conveyors with *haute couture*, but apparently the legendary portrait photographer Annie Leibovitz finds them an appropriate combo. For *Vanity Fair's* September 2012 Annual Style Issue, Leibovitz photographed Natalie Massenet, founder of the online fashion retailer Net-a-Porter, in the company's new 250,000-square-foot DC in Mahwah, N.J.

Massenet is attired in a stunning floor-length fuchsia gown, with a shiny new spiral conveyor to her right and various other conveyors, chutes, and work stations in the background. The former model and fashion editor is standing atop a Dematic belt conveyor ... surrounded by safety labels warning of the potential dangers of climbing on or tripping over the equipment.

The safety implications notwithstanding, we have to admit it was pretty exciting to see material handling equipment featured in the photo—anything that shows consumers what goes on in warehouses and DCs is a good thing. Perhaps rubber belts will be the next big thing in runway design? □

Hot tips for cold conveyors

It's official: July 2012 was the hottest on record. No wonder, then, that we've been thinking about refrigerated and freezer warehouses a lot lately. (And yes, we do think about them. That's where ice cream comes from, doesn't it?) So it was especially apropos to receive some tips for keeping conveyors running smoothly in cold environments.

The tips came courtesy of Viastore Systems Inc., the Grand Rapids, Mich.-based provider of automated storage and retrieval systems (AS/RS), conveyor systems, and warehouse management software. Here, in brief, are the company's recommendations for keeping your conveyors "comfortable" in the cold:

1. Using high-efficiency gear motors that have variable-frequency drives will increase the life of motors.

2. Special lubrication, grease, and bearings designed for cold temps will keep conveyors moving properly.

3. Tighten everything up again once the system has been installed and the space has been brought down to the proper temperature.

4. Air curtains or air vestibules can help to reduce condensation and ice buildup in interlock zones.

5. Instead of photo sensors, use limit switches at the interlocks, where there is bound to be some condensation.

6. For AS/RS or lift systems, cable that is only freezer-rated isn't good enough; it must also be rated for flexibility.

7. Special belts that resist cracking and premature wear are a necessity.

Viastore has published an article that explains these tips in more detail. To request a copy, send an e-mail to info@viastore.com or call (855) 539-8895. □