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CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

DHL Supply Chain Stretch robots

IMPLEMENTED 2023–2025 · TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS · GERMANY · BAND D · CLAIMED ONLY

VERSION 1.1 · PUBLISHED 15 NOVEMBER 2026 · UPDATED 15 NOVEMBER 2026 · FACTS CHECKED 15 NOVEMBER 2026

DHL Supply Chain has used Boston Dynamics' Stretch robot to unload containers since 2023. In May 2025 DHL Group signed a memorandum of understanding for more than 1,000 further units, with case picking as the next use. Results are DHL's own and cover unloading rates and staff satisfaction, not cost.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

This is MarLuc's summary and grading of publicly available sources, for information only. It is not investment, legal, financial or professional advice, and should not be relied on for any decision. Readers must validate it against the original sources and, where appropriate, challenge its conclusions.

Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

AI and automation used: Warehouse robot (Boston Dynamics Stretch) for case handling; the AI content, such as vision and control software, is not described in the sources.

Implemented: 2023–2025. Grade: band D, Task support, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Stretch robots reached case unloading rates of up to 700 cases per hour, by DHL's account; DHL signed a memorandum of understanding for more than 1,000 further units, May 2025

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 2 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

DHL Group. German logistics group; DHL Supply Chain is its contract logistics division. Staff numbers: Not reported in the sources opened. Group EBIT was €6.1 billion in 2025, per the annual report. Canvas block: 4. Operations and process. Also 6. Data and technology, 5. People and skills.

Business challenge

The challenge. DHL describes physically demanding work in hot or cold trailers, and says case picking is the most labour-intensive activity within DHL Supply Chain.

Who implemented it

Boston Dynamics (Equipment or robot maker): Makes the Stretch robot and co-develops solutions with DHL; the partnership began in 2018..
In-house (In-house): DHL Supply Chain: Runs the deployments in its sites and leads joint development, including the UK conveyor and palletizer project..

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: T9 AI in physical systems. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Boston Dynamics, Stretch.

Where it was built in: Robots unload containers at DHL Supply Chain sites, with a UK project integrating conveyors and palletizers; how the robot connects to DHL's warehouse systems is not reported.

What changed

Before: unloading containers and trailers was physically demanding work, by DHL's account. After: Stretch robots do container unloading at live DHL sites, by DHL's account. How many units now work, and how much unloading they do, is Not reported. [1] [2]

What it cost

Group figure only: over €1 billion invested in automation in the contract logistics division over three years, not specific to Stretch. Cost of Stretch units: Not reported.

What it saved

Not reported. DHL reports speed (up to 700 cases per hour) and higher employee satisfaction, but no cost or labour saving. [1] [2]

Governance and control

Owner, safety rules for robots working beside staff, and monitoring of results: Not reported in the sources opened. The DHL Supply Chain Global CIO is quoted on the programme.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
DHL Supply Chain's Global CIO speaks for the programme under an 'Accelerated Digitalization agenda'; a named accountable owner for the robots' results is not reported. [1]

A1 · Safe use · Not reported
Not reported.

A2 · Human in the loop · Not reported
Not reported.

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Not reported
Not reported.

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
Not reported.

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
Not reported.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– By DHL's account, deployments achieved case unloading rates of up to 700 cases per hour.

– By DHL's account, the robots contributed to higher employee satisfaction by reducing physically demanding work in hot or cold trailers.

– DHL describes the work with Boston Dynamics as joint development, including conveyor and palletizer integration in a UK project.

DID NOT

– Not reported

UNPROVEN

– Cost per case, savings, payback and effect on headcount: Not reported.

– How many Stretch units work today, and the time frame for the 1,000 additional units: Not reported in DHL's release.

– Whether case picking will work at scale: it is a stated priority, not a result.

– The 700 cases per hour is described as up to, and the conditions and average rate are Not reported.

Timeline

2018 DHL and Boston Dynamics begin their collaboration [1]

2023 DHL Supply Chain introduces Stretch commercially in North America [1]

May 2025 DHL Group signs a memorandum of understanding with Boston Dynamics for more than 1,000 additional Stretch units; case picking named as the next use [1]

2026 DHL Group's 2025 annual report editorial says robotics and artificial intelligence are increasingly contributing to quality and efficiency [2]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: B. Grade: D, Task support. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Task support.

Task support (Level 1, band D). The robot does a defined task and DHL reports speed and staff satisfaction, with no cost result. DHL describes a fundamental shift in how it operates (claimed band B); that is not yet shown in published results.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

DHL separates what is working from what it plans. Unloading is in use at live sites and has reported rates. Case picking and the 1,000 further units are intentions under a memorandum of understanding. The release gives speed and staff satisfaction but no unit economics, so a reader cannot yet tell whether the investment pays back. A mid-sized or larger operator weighing similar robots should ask for the same missing figures.

1. Start with one physical task where the work is hard and the result is easy to count.
2. Measure cost per case and the staff effect, not only peak speed.
3. Treat a memorandum of understanding as a plan until units are delivered and working.

Evidence

Score 1 of 4. Self-reported: DHL's own press release and annual report; no independent measurement.

Evaluation method. Self-reported company figures: a company press release and annual report editorial; no independent evaluation of results.

Status. Ongoing: expansion under a memorandum of understanding signed May 2025; later delivery figures Not reported.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/dhl-supply-chain-stretch-robots

[1] DHL Group: DHL Group signs MOU with Boston Dynamics for additional 1,000-robot deployment and accelerates cross-business automation strategy (press release, 13 May 2025)
https://group.dhl.com/en/media-relations/press-releases/2025/dhl-group-signs-mou-with-boston-dynamics-and-accelerates-cross-business-automation-strategy.html

[2] DHL Group: 2025 Annual Report, editorial
https://reporting-hub.group.dhl.com/2025-fy/en/the-company/editorial/

DHL Group website: https://group.dhl.com

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VERSION HISTORY

v1.1 15 November 2026 Method update: technology type set to "not established" where the sources do not say how the system worked.
v1.0 15 November 2026 First published