UPGRADING FOR E-COMMERCE

E-commerce has seen a rise in the sending of small packages from foreign countries, and these can often be difficult to process. Technology can help

In recent years, many large postal operators have become increasingly overwhelmed by small packets originating from Asia, more specifically China, due to the rise in e-commerce: several hundred thousand of these 'small import packages' have to be received and sorted every day by postal services all over the world. Using traditional sorting techniques, this is not a simple task.

These packages will generally be too small and light to be treated by the regular sorters that are used by these operators. Also, the addresses on the packets are often very difficult to locate on their supple and irregular surfaces, with the information poorly written or printed, which prevents it from being read by the existing address readers.

The CPS solution Solystic now has a proven operational solution called CPS (e-Commerce Packet Sorter). This machine has been deployed at the Dutch operator PostNL, with more than 10 installed so far. The CPS technology can process the small import packages easily, as a complementary operation to the other machinery. Due to the dimensions of these packages, they cannot be introduced into Solystic's popular XMS machines, also in use by PostNL.

For several months, Solystic has had a CPS machine in use at one of the big European operators in an international hub. It sorts more than 90,000 small

Input of the CPS machines is manual at present

import packages every day, with automatic address reading supplemented by a video-coding system.

Currently available The automatic reading experience that Solystic has acquired with the main international postal operators for the handling of letters, flat objects and parcels (in particular with Viapost, a subsidiary of France's La Poste), specifically for international mail with addresses in foreign countries, enables it to process small import packages and reach an impressive operational reading rate.

This 'e-commerce packet sorter' is available now: operational, quick to install (two technicians over two weeks) and easy to use. Its ergonomics are often praised by its users.

One of the many benefits of the CPS machine is that it is modular and can sort packets into outputs equipped with bins or bags. Although the input of the CPS is currently manual, Solystic plans to equip

There are options for where sorted mail is sent

the machines with a robotic automatic feed in the near future.

Facts and figures Cross-border e-commerce continues to grow faster than global e-commerce. For Asia, the cross-border increase was 50% year-on-year for 2016. For Western Europe, the cross-border flow is expected to grow between 17% and 20% by 2020 – higher than the overall e-commerce market, which is expected to be around 15%. There are uncertainties related to Brexit, however, as the UK, France and Germany account for 60% of European e-commerce. The packets of the cross-border flow are mainly of low value: two-thirds have a value of less than €100 (US$108). Much of this cross-border flow corresponds to parcels that Solystic is able to process on its CPS machines.

The data retrieved confirms that the cross-border flow is steadily increasing and that operators must implement efficient automation solutions, to prevent them losing money in order to route each package to the final recipient. Also, consumers are not willing to pay for the delivery, or return the product if it is not to their satisfaction, which will eat into the purchase value.

Large numbers of packages can be read and sorted
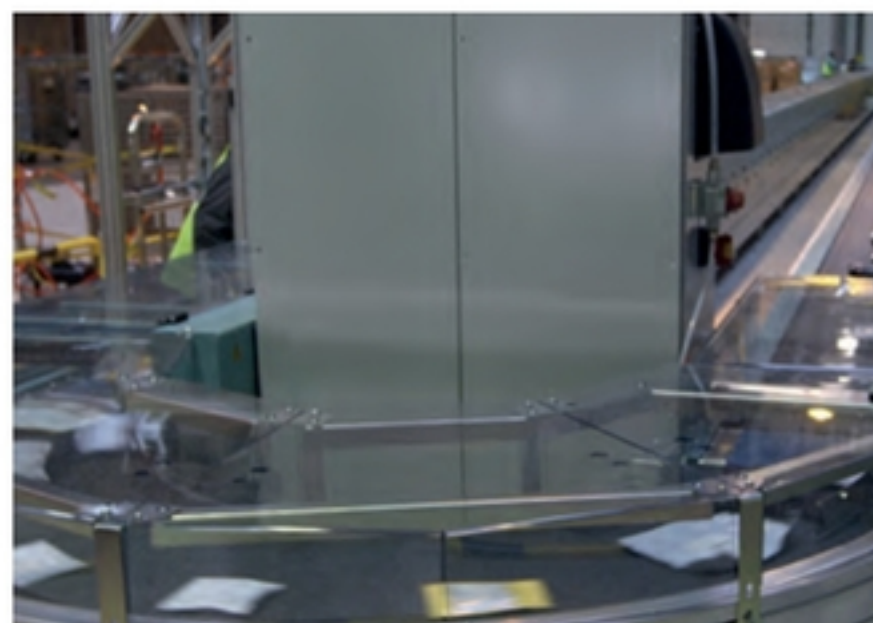
E-commerce has led to a rise in small parcel delivery