KINGS OF CONVENIENCE

Parcel locker systems provide consumers with a more convenient delivery experience when shopping online

Over the past decade, billions of people have connected themselves to the internet via computers and, more recently, mobile devices. Enabled by the internet, e-commerce is now an integral part of our lives.

The exponential increase in parcel delivery requirements has driven postal organizations and logistics companies around the world to explore automated parcel lockers as alternative delivery solutions that can provide cost-effective and convenient physical distribution of goods to the consumer.

Delivery initiative In 2012, Singapore Post (SingPost) took a more strategic approach to its POPStation parcel locker initiative, developing an integrated and staged technology approach to underpin business growth in the B2C and B2B arenas. With the growth in Singapore's online shopping market expected to grow to over S$4.4bn (US$3.5bn) by 2015 according to research by PayPal, SingPost saw an opportunity to manage first- and last-mile delivery and to revolutionize parcel delivery in the process.

Dr Wolfgang Baier, Group CEO of SingPost, says, "We started with the objective of developing a scalable technology solution that could deliver state-of-the-art service offerings to meet the lifestyle changes and demands of our customers in the future. We have a clear road map of where we are going with our POPStation service offerings and we are systematically developing and deploying the hardware and software infrastructure to support achievement of these objectives."

Value-added services SingPost has launched a range of value-added services

using its POPStation Network as the enabling infrastructure to support its offerings. The POPStation back-end server software platform offers multiple points of integration across the SingPost IT infrastructure, ensuring end-to-end integrity of the network, including granular level integration that enables checking of locker availability and locker reservations through the handheld Intermec devices couriers use in everyday operations.

For the online retailer, SingPost offers a fully integrated end-to-end online fulfillment platform through its Ezy2Ship and MyPOPStation.com online portals that ensure parcel deliveries and goods return transactions are quoted, booked, tracked and properly managed to and from the POPStation. With a range of software tools designed for easy website plug-in, online retailers can easily access the POPStation Network and offer their customers the option to have their online purchases shipped to a safe, convenient and accessible 24/7 locker location.

Coupled with an integrated payment system that accommodates electronic payment cards, stored value cash cards, and soon credit cards, customers can also pay for their goods upon pick-up, including any taxes or duties that may be applicable for the delivery.

For business customers, SingPost offers customized end-to-end solutions that leverage the POPStation Network and warehouse management capabilities to support decentralized storage or enable collection and return points for POS retail, or to support reverse logistics. SingPost expects its POPStations to evolve from traditional drop-off and pick-up hubs, to multipurpose vehicles for POS promotion, vending, storage and inventory management.

Mobile app With new consumer offerings also planned, SingPost will be expanding the POPStation offerings for C2C postings

Customers can shop online and collect their parcels from SingPost's POPStations 24 hours a day

that will enable consumer-initiated reservations, drop-offs and pick-ups from the network. Focusing at the app level, SingPost is not only leveraging available capability, but will also extend the offering to embrace social media opportunities.

SingPost will also be the first to offer consumers the ability to use their smartphones to remotely open their lockers to retrieve their parcels, eliminating the need to line up to use the kiosk. The new POPStation app, launched in August 2014, enables customers to check whether any packages have been delivered, find out the location of the deliveries, and remotely open a designated locker to access their package. The app is enabled only when the cell phone is within a specified radius of the POPStation, ensuring that the customer is physically able to access the open locker.

TZ Limited, the Australian SMArt Device technology company, has been instrumental in providing SingPost with its end-to-end parcel locker requirements from the customized design, manufacture and deployment of POPStations, through to the extensive software development and back-end system integration services that underpins and enables the platform.