

Fresh ideas for fresh products

EDEKA enhances its delivery processes by using Zebra® printers

In the retail food sector, rapid delivery processes are key to ensure that everything, from aubergines to fish fillets, reaches consumers fresh. Handling documents can slow down processes, so EDEKA's Minden-Hanover regional division in Germany sends its fleet of trucks equipped with Zebra® mobile receipt printers. Consequently instead of dealing with huge volumes of delivery documents, drivers can now print out clear delivery receipts on demand.

"We love food" is not just a catchy EDEKA advertising slogan. It's the philosophy underlying their business ethic, which has made them Germany's leading food retailer with a 2005 net turnover of EUR 37 billion. EDEKA's efficient quality assurance systems ensure customers are sold fresh fruit and vegetables. These high quality standards apply to all goods on the shelves and services, starting with delivery to the 5000-odd independent retailers that form the EDEKA group and its seven regional divisions that supply 11,000 German supermarkets.

Less paper, more streamlined processes.

When it comes to transporting freight, EDEKA's Minden-Hanover regional division leads the way. Over 1500 regional supermarkets benefit from a state-of-the-art merchandise management system based on a SAP retail platform. EDEKA's trucks use an electronic track and trace system to monitor goods from arrival at their warehouses, to delivery at retail outlets. Although these measures had already considerably reduced delivery errors, they wanted to go one step further. "Paper slows processes down," says Pedro Rodrigues, project manager at EDEKA Minden-Hanover's central office. Delivery notes made illegible by handwriting or rain and forms not clearly filled in, can result in deliveries being exchanged. Only when goods are correctly delivered can freshness and quality can be justified. Consequently the old receipt system was to be replaced by a new, almost paperless system that would equip EDEKA's trucks with mobile printers, to receive freight data electronically, transmit via a handheld device and issue receipts on demand, for goods delivered at the customers' premises.

A robust, easy-to-use mobile solution.

Initially, EDEKA could have been provided with printers by one of its hardware suppliers however there was no guarantee that these would withstand the challenging in-truck demands during start-up and braking. What were needed were robust, easy-to-use mobile devices.

"The Zebra® printers are better quality than other competitors and very easy to use," says Pedro Rodrigues, recalling the first tests with the Zebra RW 420™ model. The mobile printer was specially developed for field sales staff, comes with an optional, easy-to-install vehicle cradle, is shock-and impact-proof and requires few manual actions. This is important as drivers have early morning deliveries and now don't need to make complicated key pad combinations in the dark. The RW 420 thermal direct printer doesn't require supplies (such as carbon ribbons, ink heads or toner cartridges) as the typeface is produced by the printer head heating up the special temperature-sensitive paper.



Solution Technology

RW 420™

In-vehicle cradle



New paper rolls can also be easily inserted as there are no bending mechanisms. Integer Solutions an integration specialist, presented a convincing solution for installing in the trucks. The Zebra vehicle cradle was connected via RS 232 to the handheld device, with a cable cut to length - thus providing a ready to use printer solution. Consequently EDEKA in Minden bought 700 Zebra RW 420 printers from Integer.

High acceptance levels, facilitates introduction.

Zebra printers were installed by EDEKA Minden-Hanover in the cabs of over 400 trucks. Data is continually downloaded to the printers during trips via the vehicle cradle. Pedro Rodrigues also had around 100 additional handheld device/printer combinations which can be kept ready for hauliers who support the fleet. Additionally these Zebra printers can be powered from the cigarette lighter socket even when not permanently installed.

Over 600 EDEKA drivers now use the Zebra printers which save time. When deliveries are planned, data is generated about which vehicles are to be sent to which supermarkets with certain ranges of goods. This information is sent via wireless LAN to the relevant driver's handheld device. On arrival at the warehouse, the goods "The Zebra® printers are better quality than other competitors and very easy to use, are loaded and packed. So instead of the time-consuming process of manually comparing orders with preloaded goods, the transport barcodes on the goods containers only need scanning and matching up. Establishing whether all items for a particular supermarket are actually delivered can now be done automatically. The same applies at the retailer's premises. Instead of having to manually review lists, the driver simply prints out the relevant delivery confirmation with all the customer information.

An error rate of almost zero.

"Previously, on discovery at the customer's premises that a consignment was incomplete, the missing goods had to be delivered afterwards. This involved an additional trip. Apart from the extra time and costs incurred, the customer was left with an 'out-of-shelf' situation. Given the current competitive climate, end-consumers wouldn't visit food stores with empty shelves. Now we can guarantee that we are delivering the right consignment to the right market straight away," says Pedro Rodrigues, summarising the main benefit of travelling with fewer documents, thanks to Zebra printers. Although EDEKA Minden had a previous error rate of 0.5%, containers are hardly exchanged at all now.

Local supermarket retailers not only benefit from improved delivery quality, which guarantees their customers a complete range of fresh goods, but also from a problem-free system for administering empty containers. The driver simply specifies the quantity of returned goods containers to the warehouse from the supermarket. Using the on demand printed receipt, both the EDEKA regional division and customer can trace empty containers still in circulation, and any outstanding return costs. With this added transparency, there are very few missing containers, which mean accurate deliveries.

Pedro Rodrigues and his team have now added yet another important strand to its philosophy of "Fresh every day". "We can now offer our customers even better quality and service, which they can then pass on to their consumers."

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