

Compact Operator

Dutch automation company Flowsort is moving firmly into the intralogistics sector following its purchase by FATH Group. *Peter MacLeod* talks to its MD, *Till Zupancic*.

Among many factors boosting the intralogistics sector is a trend towards urbanisation. With real estate costs rising the nearer to a city centre a warehouse is located, logistics operators need to deploy compact new technologies to efficiently and cost-effectively service these metropolises. This new technology brings new players such as Flowsort into the sector.

The intralogistics systems manufacturer was boosted by its acquisition by FATH Group in 2021. "DCs are becoming more and more decentralised, meaning there are more of them, but mostly smaller and closer to the customer," says *Till Zupancic*, Managing Director of FATH GmbH. "Therefore, you need technologies with a smaller footprint which are more flexible in their applications, with lower investment at the beginning and which are scalable. It's that shift in required technology that makes this market so interesting for us."

FATH's core business is components for aluminium profile systems and solutions for making industrial shopfloor processes lean. In certain regions, its market share was such that there was no further prospect for growth. "Therefore, we took the decision to step into a new sector for us which has good drivers behind it, which was intralogistics automation," *Zupancic* explains. "We decided to acquire Flowsort to help us enter this new sector. It was a Dutch-based company when we acquired it, and we have scaled it around the world with our sales and distribution network.

"Flowsort wants to bring to the market products with open interfaces on both the hardware and the software side. Our direct customers are system integrators, and we believe they should have the possibility to create the optimal solutions for their end customers. Therefore, they should be able to combine our technology with all other technologies around to make the best solution. Flowsort is designed in a way that you can build it into every conveyor system."

Rocket Science Engineers

It can achieve this with the help of another FATH Group company called CEMEC GmbH, which effectively operates as a central R&D centre for the group. "I always call these guys the rocket science engineers," says *Zupancic*. "Their core business is making very special products for aerospace companies, so with very high mechanical challenges and precision. This is pretty good for a company like Flowsort, because we have experts around the world who see what's required in the market and we combine them together with these rocket science engineers to find new ways for a technical solution."

Flowsort's competitive advantage is that it can rapidly adapt to the changing requirements of the intralogistics sector, as its products are modular. "We make no specials. It's a smart modular concept, meaning that by combining the models in a smart way we can fulfil almost every required application. This brings a lot of benefits for the customers - its availability is faster and it's cheaper, because it's always a standard module using the same sub-assemblies, etc. We call it 'gentle', because it handles the product in the flow with no mechanical forces on it such as abrupt braking."



Till Zupancic, Managing Director of FATH GmbH

Soon, a new product line will be coming out of Flowsort called SpeedFlow Compact. Going back to the top of this article, urbanisation means micro fulfilment centres, and micro fulfilment centres have no space to house bulky conveyers, sorters and diverters. "It's basically the same as our existing diverters, but not so tall," *Zupancic* explains. "Our customers felt we should reduce the height, because micro fulfilment centres have more layers above each other. CEMEC designed a new product line which is only 227mm high instead of 360mm, and it's even faster - the existing units can run up to 1.5m/s, whereas the new line can run up to 2m/s, meaning we can achieve up to 8,000 products per hour."

I always say it's an exciting time to be working in the intralogistics sector, and the advances Flowsort is making under the FATH umbrella will be fascinating to follow as the company gains a greater foothold in the sector.

www.flow-sort.com



At 227mm, the new sorter unit is 133mm flatter than the standard model



Flowsort's units are designed with open software and hardware interfaces