

Logistics

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WAREHOUSE
AUTOMATION
E D I T I O N

Flowsort

A MODULAR REVOLUTION IN INTRALOGISTICS

Till Zupancic,
Managing Director Flowsort B.V. &
Head of Corporate and Business Development,
FATH Group



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Flowsort



TOP 10
WAREHOUSE
AUTOMATION
SOLUTIONS
PROVIDERS
IN EUROPE
2022

The annual listing of 10 companies in Europe that are at the forefront of providing Logistics solutions and transforming businesses in the region

By Linda James

It was often predicted that there would come a time when e-commerce would completely take over brick-and-mortar businesses, but no one imagined that the changes would occur so rapidly. The aftershocks of the COVID-19 pandemic have been causing a seismic shift in consumer behaviour which, in turn, is becoming the precursor to transformative changes in the e-commerce sector in record times. To put this into perspective, as per a recent McKinsey study, at the height of the pandemic, close to 10 years of e-commerce growth happened in just 90 days.

Such colossal transformation of businesses is also indicative of a huge influx in overall order placement, which is not only stressing the entire supply chain but also a company's intralogistics.

Many consumers have now come to expect same- or next-day delivery not only from e-commerce and retail giants but from other small- and medium-sized sellers as well. This consumer expectation is pushing many e-commerce businesses to move their distribution centres closer to cities and create micro-fulfilment centres for delivering products to the consumer at a faster pace. While e-commerce businesses need to optimise their product delivery speed from fulfilment centres to consumers, they also need to optimise the product movement within the distribution centre itself. This is precisely where the challenge lies. Interestingly, solving this impediment and bringing a modular approach to intralogistics automation is where Flowsort—one of the top 10 warehouse-automation innovators—cements its cornerstone. Flowsort has developed a range of modular and automated sortation systems, which are an integral part of intralogistics automation. “With our 25 years of experience in the industry, we have developed a range of modular sortation systems that can be used even in a smaller facility,” underlines Eric Willems, the founder of Flowsort.

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Willems explains that the common market-available intralogistics automation solutions are bulky and expensive, making them only ideal for large order fulfilment centres. “For example, many e-commerce businesses have been using an automated cross belt, tilt tray, and shoe sorters as part of their intralogistics systems. These automated solutions are capable of sorting more than 12,000-15,000 parcels per hour. But, since multiple micro-fulfilment centres share the parcel distribution load of a particular city, no distribution centre typically has to process more than 4,000-5,000 products per hour,” elaborates Willems. Hence, the ROI of these costly automation solutions are seldom fully realised, thereby making the traditional intralogistics automation solutions a cost-ineffective investment for urban fulfilment centres. These businesses can instead use Flowsort’s modular and automated sortation systems as an alternative to costly and bulky sortation

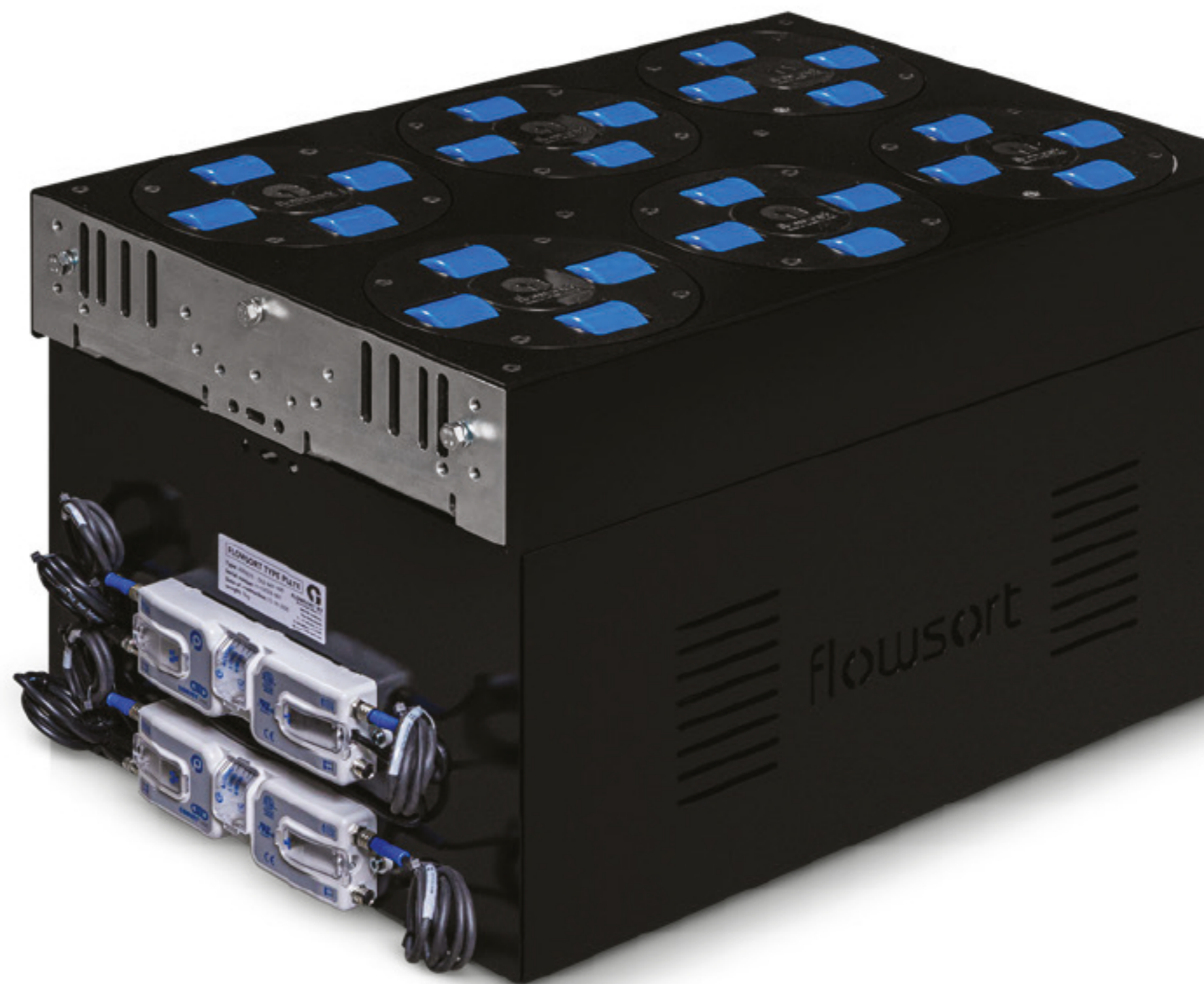
systems. Flowsort distributes these modular sortation solutions to the e-commerce and 3PL businesses through intralogistics system integrators and conveyor belt manufacturers. The modular design of the Flowsort sorting equipment lets system integrators and conveyor manufacturers purchase the sorting modules that fit their client’s unique requirements. From there, system integrators can add extra modules to their clients’ intralogistics systems to meet future needs, offering continuous scalability while keeping the initial investment much lower.

Under the Hood of Flowsort’s Sorting Systems

Flowsort offers its highly flexible sorting modules in three different categories, single-line diverters (SLD), double-line diverters (DLD), and zigzag diverters (ZZ). These diverters are available in 400-450mm/600-650mm/800-850mm/1,000-1050mm widths. Besides, Flowsort has an “open interface” approach, meaning that both hardware and software connectivity is plug-and-play with all

other surrounding technologies, regardless of which vendor those technologies are from. What more is that the principle to sort out products in a flow without mechanical forces, abrupt braking, or accelerating makes Flowsort’s sortation systems suitable to handle even sensitive parcels, whereas abrupt braking causes damage to the goods. “Thus, staying true to our name, Flowsort (flow + sorting), we aim to bring a very simple yet substantial solution for more effective sorting,” states Till Zupancic, managing director at Flowsort.

It is also important to note that Flowsort’s sorting systems are powered by mere 24V motors, which consume far less power than traditional motors. Consequently, businesses can witness huge energy efficiency gains when using Flowsort’s sortation modules and reduce their carbon footprint. During a period of low parcel inflow, the e-commerce and 3PL businesses can even turn off either of the unwanted modules, bringing remarkable energy savings and also environmental sustainability to their operations.



Simplifying the Intralogistics Automation

Since Flowsort's sorters come as baseline modules, system integrators can directly use those solutions in their new conveyor and sorting system designs or make adjustments within the system to adapt the sorting system for a variety of other use cases. They can combine multiple sortation modules and meet the process requirements of diverse sorting applications at the delivery and order fulfilment centres. "This flexibility is also one of the many reasons why intralogistics system integrators love Flowsort sortation systems, as these solutions are easy to install and integrate with other intralogistics technologies at their clients' distribution or order fulfilment centres," says Zupancic. For e-commerce and 3PL businesses, on the other hand, the benefits are around layout flexibility, scalability and universal applicability. The layout flexibility is given by the width variants and the possibility to realise any divert angle between -90 to +90 degrees. Companies can easily increase the number of sorting points by adding more Flowsort sorting modules as their business grows. Or even retrofit unautomated conveyor lines with Flowsort. The wide range of different products and product sizes that Flowsort can handle is particularly popular with end-users.

To better explain Flowsort's value proposition, Zupancic shares a recent case study. The famous German express and healthcare logistics service provider, Trans-o-Flex, was looking to set up a new site and asked their long-time partner TBWB, a renowned logistics integrator company, for help concerning the planned sorting system. The core requirements of trans-o-flex were: 1. the sorting must be gentle on the goods. 2. the plant must be energy-efficient. 3. the sorting system must be flexible in use. 4. a high degree of fail-safety must be ensured in that individual sorting areas can also be operated independently of one another. As a direct customer and implementation partner of Flowsort, TBWB decided to use Flowsort's SLD sortation system to meet Trans-o-Flex's requirements. The modular nature of Flowsort's sortation system allowed TBWB to not only implement the solution in record time but also tweak the solution according to the specific needs of Trans-o-Flex. By the end of the engagement, Trans-o-Flex was very happy with the Flowsort solution as the diverters were quickly interchangeable, which provided them with much-needed flexibility and scalability in using the sortation systems across different use cases. "Since the assembly technology was simple enough for their engineers



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to understand, the TBWB personnel could easily manage the system in the longer run,” recalls Marco De Groen, sales and marketing head at TBWB. At present, Trans-o-Flex is using roughly 126 SLD systems to handle their parcel volumes.

Preparing the Intralogistics Sector for the Post-Pandemic World

As the entire logistics industry is slowly recovering from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, Flowsort expects that there will be an even higher demand for flexible sorting systems in the days to come. More importantly, warehouses will need to strictly implement social distancing at their facilities, thereby driving companies to adopt more warehouse automation solutions. To help these businesses looking for automated sorters, Flowsort has recently merged with the global FATH Group to help intralogistics system integrators and

conveyor system manufacturers around the globe directly access Flowsort's products. Notably, FATH is very successful with components for aluminium profile system construction and with solutions for lean processes on the industrial shopfloor. "Intralogistics system integrators will now have access to these solutions from a single source through the connection of FATH and Flowsort and thus be able to bring more productivity to the intralogistics sector and to enrich working lives there as well," concludes Zupancic **LT**

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