

## Automatic package opening in new dimensions

Over four million parcels are opened at Hermes Fulfilment every year - without any damage to the goods

With a size of around 26 soccer fields, the Hermes Fulfilment mail-order center in Haldensleben, Germany, is not only the largest in Europe but also the oldest. The opening ceremony in 1994 was accompanied by Helmut Kohl, the chancellor. Since that year, the Otto Group the parent company has invested almost 470 million Euros in the mail-order center. All services along the flow of goods for distance sellers are managed here. From the development of the web store to delivery for service providers such as Otto, Bon Prix and BAUER. Around 3,500 employees dispatch up to 300,000 shipments daily. Such peak numbers require a sophisticated logistics process. In this context, the six Automatic-Box-Openers of ALS Automatic Logistic Solutions play an essential role. They efficiently support the picking process, ensure less cut up goods and finally also guarantee an optimized relief of employees. About 4.2 million parcels perforated the ALS machines at the Haldensleben site alone in 2018.

The Hermes dispatch center in Haldensleben stores besides shoes and smaller electronic items such as cell phones and laptops, also textiles. In other words, all of these are small volume items that fit into a carton with the peak dimensions of 600 x 400 x 400 mm (L/W/H). A cutter's knife cut into the expensive silk blouse or the brand new display from the tablet would be a financial loss for Hermes Fulfilment. Added to this are delays in the entire process flow. Such 'process disruption damage' must be avoided as a matter of course, especially since such 'damage' can be of a not inconsiderable magnitude with 14,000 package openings per day. For several years now, the machines of ALS Automatic Logistic Solutions have been opening a large number of parcels, and Hermes Fulfilment saves money. The Automatic-Parcel-Openers not only bring financial advantages. Also, employees are relieved physically. A look at the daily process flow reveals more.



**A total of six Automatic-Box-Opener systems from ALS Automatic Logistic Solutions support the picking process in the dispatch center of Hermes in Haldensleben very efficiently.**

### Insights into the daily routine of a parcel opener

The high-bay warehouse, the heart of the Hermes mail-order center in Haldensleben, is as high as a twelve-story high-rise building. From here, the supplier cartons are brought via conveyor lines to the six Automatic-Box-Openers 'WIM' (Window Method). In order to ensure chaotic, i.e. size-independent processing, each carton is measured individually. The carton is then clamped and tilted into an inclined position by a tilting mechanism. In the next step, a suction cup is placed on the carton: the carton is fixed, and a counter-pressure is also generated for the piercing blade. An intelligent move, because this also creates an artificial cavity inside the package. The contents of the package move away from the cardboard and are not touched by the knife. The robot arm then perforates a window in the front of the carton with the ALS patented perforation knife PAM. The specially developed cutter head is one of the many technologies of ALS to ensure that the goods stray intact. "PAM is more than just a cutter head. We have invested a lot into innovations- and it pays off with every single carton," says Paul Kammerscheid, Managing Director of ALS Automatic Logistic Solutions based in Gruenwald near Munich.

"In addition to these very demanding requirements, Hermes Fulfilment also considers it imperative that the perforated carton can cover an additional transportation distance without losing the carton window or even goods," explains Stefanie Palm, Project Manager Operations Optimization and Development Logistics Systems & Fulfilment Solutions at Hermes Fulfilment. Palm continues: "Since the automated perforation machines have been in use at Hermes, the number of damaged goods has fallen sharply. In fact, the number of damaged goods has decreased to exactly the extent that we had calculated in advance. So we can now draw the satisfying conclusion that in practical use we realized exactly the cost savings that we had roughly expected from the parcel openers".

The maintenance of all six parcel openers is due again in a few months. "Annual maintenance is completely sufficient for us," says Stefanie Palm.



**Three packet openers of the WIM model series from ALS standing in a row. About 4.2 million parcels perforated the parcel opening systems of ALS in 2018 in the Hermes mail-order center.**

### ALS Parcel-Opener: Unrivalled in Europe

Innovation' is not a foreign word for Hermes Fulfilment, on the contrary. Very early on, the company was looking for a suitable method to optimize the picking process. Now it has succeeded: "1.5 years after we connected the last of the six machines to the network (January 2018), we can confirm with complete conviction that we are very satisfied with the performance of the parcel openers," says Harald Wolff, head of the logistics planning/control department at Hermes Fulfilment, underlining the performance of the parcel openers used. "There are only positive effects," Wolff continues. "The new process flow preserves the employee's capacities, prevents cutting injuries and, last but not least, protects the carton contents".

The mechanical engineering specialist ALS Automatic Logistic Solutions focuses exclusively on automatic parcel opening in intralogistics. The parcel openers are used in the incoming goods and returns department, in order picking as well as in dispatch optimization. "There is no real competitor in Europe," says Kammerscheid. "We have patented our products and our know-how built up through a lot of experience as far as possible. After all, anyone who has a lot of cartons needs an Automatic-Box-Opener."



**Before Automatic-Box-Opener were used at Hermes, it was not uncommon for the goods to be severely damaged when opening the outer packaging, for example, when cutting out the corrugated cardboard windows.**