

FORTNA

Client Success Series

Facilitating growth and boosting throughput at Coolblue



Challenge

Coolblue is a leading, fast-growing online retailer operating in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. Until 2019, Coolblue performed all sorting manually, and then added the help of a small sortation machine, with all packages sorted in just three directions. But as the company continued to experience strong growth, they needed to automate their sortation processes to increase their throughput and exceed customer expectations. Coolblue sought a scalable solution that would accommodate not only their present volumes, but scale to match their growth over time and meet the high demands of peak season.

“The ability to ramp up to meet demand really matters, especially on days when there is a lot of online ordering, such as in the run-up to Black Friday,” said Joost Alewijnse, Manager of Warehouse Mechanization & Applications, Coolblue. “It is very important to respond to this.”

Project Parameters

- Boost operational efficiency and scalability for continued growth
- Increase number of sorting destinations

Timeline

- Installed in 2019
- Additional exits added in 2021

Outcome

- New system carries out tasks previously handled manually
- Increase in sorting destinations from three to 46
- Thousands of packages sorted per hour



Solution

After researching options, Coolblue identified FORTNA and the HC Sorter as the right partner and solution. “The company and the HC Sorter were very well known in the market and the technology suited our needs well,” Alewijnse said. “The solid communication and concepts gave us the confidence to continue working together.”

Coolblue initially considered a cross-belt sorter, but ultimately chose the HC sliding shoe because of the simple scalability that the technology’s modular design offered. “An installed cross belt can only be expanded to a limited extent, with a long downtime of the entire system to factor in,” Alewijnse said. “On the other hand, a shoe sorter system can be expanded quite easily during a weekend. At Coolblue we are constantly on the move. That is why flexibility and future expansion possibilities are important aspects for us.”

The 164-foot-long solution was installed prior to the end-of-year peak season in 2019 with six entrances and 26 different exits, significantly expanding capacity and efficiency over the three sortation destinations of Coolblue’s manual process.

The HC Sorter carefully processes packages in two shifts at a rate of six and a half feet per second, allowing it to sort thousands of packages per hour. The sorter’s patented closed deck prevents packages from getting stuck between the slats, minimizing downtime and product damage – crucial for e-commerce operations handling a wide variety of SKUs, especially during the busy peak season.

Outcome

Installed just prior to peak season, the sorter's high capacity and maximized uptime immediately helped Coolblue perform during what would have been an otherwise extremely challenging peak. After installation, the FORTNA team remains in close contact to continuously optimize the solution to meet the company's evolving needs. In fact, because e-commerce is constantly changing and the online retailer continues to grow, the sorting solution has already been expanded with 20 additional exits. "This was an exciting and big project," said Alewijnse. "During the aftercare phase, our regular contact person actively strived for improvements and solutions."



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About FORTNA

FORTNA partners with the world's leading brands to transform omnichannel and parcel distribution operations. Known world-wide for enabling companies to keep pace with digital disruption and growth objectives, we design and deliver solutions, powered by intelligent software, to optimize fast, accurate and cost-effective order fulfillment and last mile delivery. Our people, innovative approach and proprietary algorithms and tools ensure optimal operations design and material and information flow. We deliver exceptional value every day to our customers with comprehensive services and products including network strategy, distribution center operational design and implementation, material handling automated equipment, robotics and a comprehensive suite of lifecycle services.

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