



A single control unit for Renz digital parcel boxes.

Rarely has there been a more aptly described “hidden champion” than Erwin Renz Metallwarenfabrik GmbH & Co KG. Both the main office and largest factory of Europe’s leading letter and parcel box manufacturer are located on the edge of the placid town of Kirchberg an der Murr, Germany. Visitors entering the foyer, which doubles as a showroom, are greeted with an extraordinary range of products, award-winning designs and meticulous details. It’s a display of consummate specialisation deep in the heart of the Schwabenland, as this region of Germany is affectionately known. The latest development in particular is something to write home about: a digitally controlled parcel box cluster, complete with an app that provides residents of multi-flat houses with a simple way to receive and send parcels – regardless of which parcel service is used – and much more.

Starting point. Manufacturing metal products remains one of Renz’s core businesses to this day. The bustling factory adjoining its main office uses cutting-edge machinery and skills honed over decades to punch, bend and emboss materials. The company delivers over 100,000 letter and parcel boxes each year, many of them produced to match exact specifications, with custom materials and features. Nearly half of the letterbox clusters in Germany are made by this home-grown market leader. But even this basic mainstay has not gone untouched by digitalisation. The online sales boom has made it more and more important to be able to send and receive packages easily.

Project objectives. Since 2007, Renz has been producing and selling mechanical parcel boxes designed primarily for single-family homes. These boxes allow families to receive packages even when they’re out and about, without having to rely on a neighbour. In 2013, Renz began developing electronic parcel boxes and combination letter/parcel box systems for multi-flat houses and larger residential complexes. The purpose of the new systems was to

“Bechtle supplied us with invaluable support for key components of our project, both as a procurement partner and as a skills provider. Our previously rewarding partnership in the traditional area of IT infrastructure paved the way for us to tackle this innovation with success.”

Stefan Würtemberger

Head of IT,
Renz Group

leverage state-of-the-art technology in order to take full advantage of shared parcel box clusters and enable a broad range of delivery and pick-up options. The first web-managed, touch-enabled pilot system was taken live in Stuttgart in autumn 2015. Just six months later an updated version, featuring advanced on-board technology and an app, was scheduled to launch.

Process. Renz's 11-person IT department had previously handled mainly the strategy and operation of office IT, ERP, data centre and website services. Now, for the first time, it was incorporated directly into the company's value chain to help develop the latest generation of parcel boxes. Bechtle accompanied the project as an external IT partner from the start all the way to the solution's market launch. The solution uses Renz's self-developed control unit, the Renz-Steuerereinheit Plus, featuring a touch panel PC and Windows 10 IoT. Bechtle's role was to advise Renz on the selection and procurement of IT components. The Bechtle Competence Centre for Business Collaboration developed the accompanying app, which delivers a convenient user experience on smartphones and other mobile devices. The Bechtle Internet Security & Services (BISS) Competence Centre also contributed by implementing a comprehensive security strategy, including an audit.

Solution. Renz parcel box clusters are linked to a web portal for all of the system's back-end processes, such as new-resident registration and data exchanges with parcel services. Property managers can also use the portal for insight into the usage rate and status of one or more clusters. To pick up or leave a parcel in one of the boxes, users identify themselves using an RFID chip, app or code. Recipients are informed by e-mail, text message or push notification that a package is waiting for them. This singular solution can be used by any parcel service to pick up and deliver packages. It even goes beyond letters and parcels, enabling registered residents to receive a variety of deliveries, for example from pharmacies or other local providers. Users themselves and other individuals can also store and retrieve objects securely.

Business benefits. Clusters with the latest control technology can accommodate up to 500 letter or parcel boxes. Expanding beyond Renz's core activity of equipping new and renovated buildings, these clusters are also aimed at as-yet untapped market segments. More and more opportunities are presenting themselves, not only to upgrade existing letterbox clusters but also to branch out into entirely new usage scenarios. For instance, rental companies can increase the appeal of their properties through the added value these installations offer. Also, the ability to make ordered goods available for pick-up outside of business hours – known as click and collect – is an alluring advantage for wholesale, retail and specialist shops. This makes it even easier to closely interweave online with local services. Another potential beneficiary are businesses, who would be able to streamline in-house delivery processes and even allow employees to have personal orders shipped to their place of work.

CUSTOMER PROFILE



Renz, a family-owned business, is one of Europe's leading producers of letter and parcel box clusters. Founded in 1925 by Erwin Renz in Kirchberg an der Murr, the third-generation, owner-managed company has over 90 years of experience and a rich tradition. Its main office has remained at the company's original location in south-western Germany. Five subsidiaries have joined it in Germany, France, the UK, Denmark and Poland, together forming the Renz Group, which currently employs 700 staff throughout Europe.

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