

# Automated small parts warehouse increases sales and customer satisfaction at Tollkühn Shoppartner GmbH

Shorter distances, fewer complaints and more pleasant working conditions: With customized intralogistics, the Tollkühn Shoppartner GmbH remains on course for sustainable success. At the heart of the perfected material flow is an AutoStore small-parts warehouse, implemented as a complete solution by AM-Automation.

“We supply many small retailers.” At least, that’s how Stefan Schwarz, as operations manager, describes the function of wholesaler Tollkühn Shoppartner GmbH. Located in the Lower Saxony community of Stuhr on the outskirts of Bremen, the company specializes in the specific product ranges of service stations and car dealerships. Tollkühn supplies ice scrapers and engine oils, baby wipes and work gloves, air fresheners and 24-volt coffee machines – in short, every conceivable non-food item that car and truck drivers need day after day. Tollkühn has been on the market for almost 40 years and is one of the leading suppliers in the industry nationwide.

## Order picking with error potential

And that’s not all: “Some of our customers also want us to label the goods with the price tag they want,” says Stefan Schwarz, who in his position is also responsible for the further development of Tollkühn’s logistics concept. In addition, in the past it was common for there to be only one delivery bill for each customer and delivery, even if there were several shipping units – the allocation of the individual items was sometimes quite complicated

for the recipient and repeatedly led to complaints. So the decision was made to completely overhaul all logistics processes with the close involvement of the internal IT department.

## Minimum expenditure of storage space

In search of a simpler – and above all future-proof – solution, Tollkühn Shoppartner came across AM-Automation and the AutoStore concept. Instead of storing small parts in shelving racks, AutoStore relies on an automated system to manage standardized plastic bins, which are housed in large numbers within a modular aluminum structure. For picking, bins containing the desired items are picked by robots operating on top of the structure. AutoStore software stays constantly updated on the location of each bin and the goods inside. Instead of manually assembling an order and running from shelf to shelf, AutoStore transports the desired items directly to the picking workstation. The bottom line is greater efficiency in intralogistics with minimal use of warehouse space.

## More sales and satisfied customers

“When we first got to know AutoStore, we were euphoric on the one hand, but on the other hand there were skeptical voices in the company,” recalls the Tollkühn logistics specialist. The idea of a “black box” whose function and inner workings are not apparent at first glance initially caused some people unease.

But within a few weeks of commissioning, all doubts had evaporated: “Thanks to AutoStore, our business functions faster and more flexibly than ever before, and the system’s performance was and is quite simply convincing in every respect.”

At the beginning of 2016, Tollkühn Shoppartner GmbH decided in favor of the novel concept and the cooperation with AM-Automation. Headquartered in Offenau (Baden-Württemberg), AM-Automation is Germany’s leading distributor of AutoStore systems and also develops complete solutions incorporating all existing and necessary intralogistics requirements. This was also the case for Tollkühn Shoppartner: Within just six months, the specialists from AM-Automation implemented a system that can now accommodate up to 13,000 storage containers. However, the beginnings of the project were somewhat bumpy in the literal sense of the word. Following AM-Automation’s specification, the evenness of the existing warehouse floor was only allowed to deviate from the specifications by a few millimeters – something the customer’s structure was not absolutely able to meet. Accordingly, the AutoStore construction had to be preceded by an adjustment of the evenness.

Indes: Since the AutoStore system was put into operation at Tollkühn Shoppartner GmbH three years ago by now, there are only satisfied faces all around. Networked IT systems facilitate order picking, the error rate in individual price labeling is hardly worth mentioning, and there is now a separate delivery bill for each package.

“AutoStore and the cooperation with AM-Automation have helped in every way to increase customer satisfaction and further expand our market position.”

*Stefan Schwarz is pleased.*

In the meantime, an extension of the plant has already been ordered. Then the AutoStore plant will have more than 3 times the current capabilities.

