

# More configurable box banks as ByBox launches 'virtual warehouse'

A new generation of intelligent box banks is about to be rolled out by ByBox, the unattended delivery specialist that nowadays focuses on the field service market.

The new box banks, while offering many of the same features as the original version, will be built in more modular form, so that the configuration of box sizes within each array of boxes can be altered over time to reflect local demand. With the current design, each box bank has a fixed selection of different door and compartment sizes.

The software and IT hardware in each box bank is also being updated. Battery backup has been extended from four to fourteen hours, and a version with embedded RFID capability (radio frequency identification) is being developed. The company says this will add an additional level of security to operations, since it will be able to confirm not just that goods have been inserted in the box, but also that they are actually present at any given time.

ByBox has also announced a new service called ByBox2Box, under which goods can be left in one box for onward delivery to another, without necessarily passing through the



company's central system. The key to this, according to managing director Stuart Miller, is a special barcode label that describes the routing of each item. "In effect, our box networks will become virtual warehouses," Miller says.

The new system draws on some of the technology developed for an existing system called "Black Stripe" for handling returned goods. Engineers affix a special add-on label to an existing barcode label to identify an item as a return, allowing most of the data on the original label to remain valid. Miller says this system has already handled around 280,000 returns.

Following its acquisition of Hays' parts delivery business in 2003, ByBox


transformed itself last year from a technology company into a fully-operational overnight delivery company with a network of its own eight depots. It now has about 11,000 non-electronic drop boxes based on the acquired Hays system, plus 4,000 "doors" in its intelligent box-bank network. Both systems continue to be developed.

ByBox has just gained full ownership of the French

factory manufacturing its box-bank systems. This company, which produces Logibag left-luggage lockers, is a world leader in its market, but saw a decline in demand after fulfilling a large proportion of the world requirement for new-generation "intelligent" lockers.

Although business-to-business operations now account for much of ByBox's activity, the company says it also remains committed to the idea of developing B2C unattended delivery solutions, and is currently involved in B2C trials in various parts of the world.

More on ByBox in a special feature in our next issue

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