

POSTAL NEWS

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1. European postal network buys stake in Shutl's delivery revolution

A start-up that claims its technology will transform how consumers' online purchases are delivered has sold a stake to a European postal giant.

Tom Allason

Shutl founder Tom Allason believes his online marketplace for same day couriers can transform ecommerce

James Hurley

By James Hurley 8:30AM BST 10 May 2011

Shutl, which is just 18 months old, has raised £650,000 as one of Europe's largest postal networks joined existing backers in its latest investment round.

Shutl founder Tom Allason said that the undisclosed postal group will provide introductions that could see it work with some of its new backer's 50,000 customers across Europe. The investor, whose stake represents less than 10pc of Shutl, is one of Europe's largest employers.

"We were in discussion with a number of venture capitalists when we were approached by this party [but] we felt no traditional investor could bring as much to the table," said Mr Allason.

London-based Shutl recently completed a successful trial with Argos, which saw the retail giant's customers given the option of having products bought online delivered in as little as 90 minutes for £4.95.

The technology works by connecting retailers with local same-day couriers in a virtual marketplace. Delivery capacities are compiled in a web service which can be integrated with retailers' e-commerce platforms, allowing them to offer a specified same-day delivery slot at a price comparable to the cost of standard multi-day delivery by relying on local stock and couriers rather than a handful of centralised hubs.

The six-month Argos trial, which was originally confined to London, is now expected to be rolled out to a number of the chain's other UK stores.

Mr Allason said that he started Shutl because he saw consumers' delivery options lagging behind the growth of e-commerce.

“The first recorded online sale was in 1994 — a Sting CD for \$12.50. The internet was just 30,000 pages. Now, Google indexes trillions of pages a day. You can buy anything from anywhere in seconds but delivery hasn't changed in all that time,” he said.

Shutl has raised a total of £1.6m in venture finance. Its lead investor is early-stage private equity firm Hummingbird Ventures. It also counts LoveFilm investor Simon Murdoch and Bebo co-founder Paul Birch among its backers.

It will use its latest investment to build a UK sales force and to “begin exploring” the European market via its new investor, Allason said, adding that the company would raise additional finance later this year.

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2. Swiss Post invests CHF 20m in improved letter and parcel services

Swiss Post

May 16, 2011.

Swiss Post has unveiled plans to spend about CHF 20 million in improving letter and parcel services for consumers.

The Swiss postal group said it aimed to strengthen its leadership position in its four core businesses with high levels of service quality. The measures will improve access and services both in urban and rural areas.

From September 5, 2011 onwards, 93% of letters will be collected from postboxes after 17.00. The number of postboxes with an evening collection at 19.00 will rise by 139 to 457, and the number with a Sunday collection at 17.00 will increase by 143 to 396 locations. Swiss Post will spend an extra CHF 8 million a year for this measure so that it can offer postboxes with attractive collection times at central locations in all regions in future.

Moreover, Swiss Post intends to further improve its high level of reliability in letter processing and delivery by investing in state-of-the-art technology at letter centres and in employee training. As part of the technology investment, identification chips on letter containers will allow mail to be better monitored in future and will mean that user errors can be rectified in a targeted manner. Such measures are intended to retain the appeal of letter mail going forward.

Swiss Post also intends to better meet the needs of its customers with regard to parcels. It thus plans to increase the number of PickPost points from 350 (at present) to around 500. Customers who are unable to collect their consignments during the day can make use of this free service to pick up their parcels and registered letters at a time and place to suit them. Aside from conventional post offices, collection points may also include train stations, newsstands and filling stations.

To make it easier for customers to mail their consignments, Swiss Post has also extended acceptance times for PostPac Priority mail at 64 post offices in Switzerland. More than 200 post offices now accept parcels up to 16.00 for next-day delivery. The popular Swiss Post app directs customers to the nearest post office offering this service. As of 5 September 2011, both the Swiss Post portal and the Swiss Post app will also include a location search function for postboxes.

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