

Fastbolt's digital transformation continues

One year after its compact bin storage system Jungheinrich PowerCube became fully operational, Editor Claire Aldridge visited Fastbolt Group in Gronau, Germany, to see first-hand how this major investment in automation, as well as new digital solutions and ambitious expansion plans, are enabling the distributor to deliver greater efficiency and services for its customers across Europe.

Since becoming operational in May 2025 the PowerCube has transformed the way Fastbolt handles smaller stock quantities. By transferring thousands of smaller inventory locations into the compact automated system, the company has freed up significant pallet storage capacity for larger stock volumes – while improving picking efficiency.

Ekkehard Beermann, managing director at Fastbolt, underlines: "As a relatively small company, the PowerCube was our first step into automation and it has certainly been successful. Our plan is to continue our path to digitalise our distribution processes, with a final goal to make our business more efficient, more scalable, and ultimately deliver greater value to our customers."

For customers, the PowerCube introduced multiple benefits. "The biggest advantage is that we can stock more products," says Ekkehard. "By moving smaller quantities into the PowerCube, we free up pallet locations for additional stock. That means a wider product range, better availability, as well as greater supply consolidation for our distribution customers."

The automated system has also accelerated order processing, with more than a third of Fastbolt's order lines now picked through the PowerCube. Integrated with the company's warehouse management system, the PowerCube enables faster, more efficient order fulfilment while reducing travel time for warehouse operators.

Another key advantage of the PowerCube is its scalability. Designed to grow alongside Fastbolt's business, the system can be expanded by increasing the size of the storage grid, adding additional robot shuttles or installing further picking stations.

"We chose the PowerCube because it gives us flexibility for the future," explains



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Ekkehard. "If we need more performance, we can simply add more shuttles. If we need more capacity, we can extend the grid. That allows us to grow step by step without having to replace the system or stop the warehouse."

Alongside warehouse automation, Fastbolt has also continued to invest heavily in digital technologies. Its in-house developed FBoonline eCommerce platform connects directly with customers' purchasing systems, enabling automated ordering, 'real time' visibility and seamless data exchange. "We see digitalisation as much more than software," mentions Ekkehard. "The more connected our systems become with our customers, the easier it is for them to access our stock, automate their purchasing processes and rely on Fastbolt as an extension of their own business."



The company is also developing new digital solutions to expand FBoonline to make purchasing faster and more efficient. This includes the launch of FBoonline as a mobile App – launched at this year's Fastener Fair Italy in Milan. Ekkehard explains: "The App has been on our mind for a long time and we are proud of what we have developed. This new solution enables distributor customers to have all relevant 'real time' information on our range, including availability and price, on their mobile devices."

Wherever customers are working – in the office, at the trade counter or checking stock in the warehouse – the FBoonline App gives them immediate access to key product information and enables orders to be placed instantly. Customers can also start the process on a mobile device and complete further order handling later on the larger desktop version when they return to the office. The App is also designed to make item selection as quick and straightforward as possible, including through an integrated barcode scanner.

"This new mobility opens up a whole new level of value-added services for our customers," says Ekkehard. "We see a wide variety of uses, all focused on making purchasing faster, easier, and more flexible, plus what is more – we're not stopping there."

Fastbolt's developers are working on further enhancements, including integration of FBoonline chat with the relevant Fastbolt sales contact, as well as Optical Character Recognition (OCR) functionality that will



allow articles to be identified by scanning customer item numbers.

These digital solutions have never been more important. Ekkehard emphasises: "The role of the distributor is changing rapidly. While product quality, availability, delivery performance and competitive pricing remain important, distributors are increasingly expected to offer a wider range of value-added services that help customers simplify their own operations. It's no longer just about supplying products, customers are looking for logistics support, digital connectivity and services they either cannot or do not want to manage themselves." By combining automation with in-house digital development, Fastbolt aims to help customers reduce complexity, improve purchasing efficiency and respond more quickly to market demands and pressures.

One of the biggest pressures facing distributors today is the growing complexity of regulation – including the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) regulation. "The general idea behind CBAM is right," states Ekkehard. "The aim is to create a level playing field and prevent carbon leakage. The challenge is that businesses are being asked to comply with a system that is still evolving."

Ekkehard continues: "As a result, distributors are having to navigate changing rules, evolving reporting requirements and uncertainty around emissions verification, all while continuing to provide customers

a system to automate the collection and management of CBAM data. The in-house software will integrate emissions information into Fastbolt's purchasing and logistics processes, while making relevant information readily available to customers – giving them the transparency they require.

"Regulatory requirements are only becoming more complex," continues Ekkehard. "Without intelligent digital solutions, it will be increasingly difficult to manage global supply chains efficiently. Our aim is to remove that complexity for our customers, allowing them to focus on running their own businesses."

Looking ahead, Fastbolt has taken another significant step in its future growth by acquiring additional land adjacent to its existing headquarters. The site will support the company's medium-term plans to construct a new high bay warehouse that will act as a backup facility, while also creating capacity for continued product range expansion – enabling Fastbolt to increase its product offering from 10,000 stock items to 15,000.

"As customer expectations continue to evolve, distributors are increasingly looking beyond price to partners that can help simplify procurement, improve efficiency and strengthen supply chain resilience," comments Ekkehard. "For Fastbolt, expanding its stock range and investing in automation and digitalisation are all part of helping customers consolidate more of their purchasing with a single supplier – selling exclusively to distributors."

By consolidating purchasing, distributors can reduce the administrative burden of managing multiple suppliers, lower transport and handling costs, improve stock availability and simplify their procurement processes. Combined with Fastbolt's digital purchasing tools, this also enables customers to respond more quickly to changing market conditions.

Ekkehard adds: "Often our distributor customers tell us: 'If you also stocked this product, we could buy even more from you'. That's why our product management team is constantly reviewing our range, removing slow moving products and adding new items that create opportunities for our customers."

Fastbolt's investment in the Jungheinrich PowerCube, and its in-house digital platforms, further support this strategy.

With one successful year of PowerCube, continued investment in digital technologies, as well as ambitious plans to expand both its product range and warehouse capacity, Fastbolt is continuing to evolve its role as a modern and reliable supply partner for European distributors. +

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The newly launched FBonline App

with reliable pricing and service. For many businesses, particularly SMEs, the administrative burden is becoming as significant as the financial impact. We're importing products and selling them without knowing exactly what the final CBAM costs will be. That makes planning difficult – not only for us, but for our customers."

Fastbolt has chosen to respond through digital innovation, with the company's in-house software team now developing