

Smart Lockers Deliver a Safe Solution During COVID-19

By: Andy Cole, Datrose

As the world adjusts to the new realities brought on by COVID-19, smart locker technologies that provide touch-free package delivery are growing as a solution for universities, the food service industry, retailers, and corporations to protect their consumers, clients and employees.

Recent research finds that Buy Online, Pick up in Store (BOPIS) is being embraced by 62 percent of consumers as a way to reduce exposure to the coronavirus, according to a survey conducted by SaaS provider Qudini.

Smart lockers take the BOPIS concept a step further by eliminating the need for any person to person contact. While smart lockers are relatively new, their application in today's times offer many new possibilities to enable social distancing and promote safety.

Here are some of the most effective ways Datrose, an expert in smart locker technologies with 44 years of BPO experience, has seen different industries utilize this touch-free, streamlined and efficient package delivery process.

Universities

With universities across the country looking to return to campuses in the fall, smart lockers can offer a viable solution for students to pick up textbooks and receive packages from home and retailers. Smart lockers also provide an effective, convenient, and affordable solution for universities to manage student meals and dining hall services.

- **Mailroom and School Store**

University mailroom staff can spend less time and resources hunting down missing packages and responding to frequent package status inquiries with the full chain of custody tracking smart lockers provide.

Couriers or mailroom staff deposit a package into a smart locker, and students are automatically alerted that they have a package ready. Smart lockers eliminate the need for students to wait in long lines to pick up their order.

Students can also order books for the semester ahead of time, and bookstore staff can simply fill the order and place in a locker to be picked up at the student's convenience. This allows for a drastic reduction in the amount of foot traffic in school stores, particularly towards the beginning of each semester.

- **Student Meal Order / Dining Hall Services**

Covid-19 has forced universities to completely rethink the student dining experience and the way meals are prepared.

This is what the meal order fulfillment and pick-up process looks like with an integrated smart locker solution:

1. Students place food order via online portal or by calling ahead
2. Employees prepare/fill the order and deposit meals into a smart locker dedicated to each specific order
3. Smart locker software integrates with third-party e-commerce portal, which alerts the student that their order is ready for pickup automatically via text, email, or a mobile app.
4. Student uses their unique five-digit code or mobile app once they arrive at the smart locker to retrieve their order.

This process eliminates the bottleneck effect of multiple people waiting to pick up their order at the same time. Once a student is alerted that they have an order ready, they can pick up their order at their convenience without having to physically exchange money or interact with other people.

“UNLV is saving thousands yearly and has made the package experience for students and staff exceptional,” says Warren Porter, Director of Operations at UNLV.

Food Service Industry / Grocery

According to the Coresight Research Online Grocery Survey 2020, of 1,152 consumers polled, 52 percent had bought groceries online in the past 12 months. This is the first time ever that more than half of respondents had done so. The amount of people who order groceries and place food orders online has more than doubled in the past two years alone.

This rapid shift in consumer behavior has been catalyzed greatly by COVID-19 outbreak. One of the greatest challenges for the food industry is adapting to social distancing, all while keeping orders fresh and expediting the order fulfillment and pick-up process.

Smart lockers empower food industry businesses and customers alike by providing a convenient, secure, and touch-free option to pick up their orders. By installing smart lockers, restaurants and grocery stores can create a dedicated space for customers to pick up orders at peak freshness, all while remaining socially distant.

Not only does this improve the customer experience and promote social distancing, it greatly reduces time and labor required by those preparing the order. No more need to worry about searching through the receipts on multiple orders behind the counter while hungry customers stare at you from across the counter. No longer will employees need to worry about alerting the customer that their order is ready and babysit that order until the customer has the time to retrieve it. Simply prepare the order and let smart locker technology do the rest.

Retail

Retail has been hit particularly hard by COVID-19. Brick and mortar retail stores across the world lost a significant amount of their foot traffic virtually overnight. With traditional BOPIS, customers still have to walk into the store, wait in lines, and interact with customer service to pick-up orders.

Smart lockers allow businesses to fill orders as they come in, and simply deposit the order into the smart lockers for the customer to pick up at their convenience. Customers are alerted via mobile app, text, or email when their order is ready, and they can access their order by simply opening their locker with their smart phone.

Corporations

Now more than ever corporations are looking for ways to increase their efficiency and save money, all while remaining engaged with their employee base and keeping them safe. Smart lockers assist in accomplishing these objectives.

Smart lockers can:

- Reduce shrinkage by eliminating lengthy time spent away from the office retrieving packages
- Increase employee satisfaction and be used as a recruiting tool
- Serve as a contactless hub for equipment rentals
- Provide a full chain of custody tracking for equipment rentals and packages alike
- Integrate seamlessly with third-party systems

The above are a few examples of how smart lockers can be used both responsibly and effectively to promote social distancing in a post coronavirus world. To help propel the contactless initiative, Datrose is moving towards equipping smart lockers with sterilization tools such as ultraviolet LEDs, disinfectants and aerosol sprays inside the locker to keep disease transmission at bay. For more information, visit datrose.com.



About the Author: Andy Cole joined Datrose in February 2020 as a Business Development and Marketing Specialist for Smart Locker Solutions, bringing several years of experience in last-mile delivery solutions.