

MARTIN SCHMIDT

We sat down with Martin Schmidt, Managing Director of Cycle Logistics CL GmbH and Blue Cargo Biketechnik GmbH, to talk about the most pressing issues within the cycle logistics industry, including the key benefits of cycle logistics and how things can still improve to ensure the growth and professional recognition of its labour force.

Hi Martin, within the last mile delivery (LMD) sector, cycle logistics is growing. Can you tell us what benefits cycle logistics has over more "conventional" modes of transport?

First of all, we need to consider what is being delivered. Bicycle logistics makes sense for small, light shipments that need to be

delivered to individual locations, but not when a customer gets many packages delivered all at once. We must also consider the accessibility of the customer. For example, take Friedrichstraße, here in Berlin. It's closed to cars, so I can ride my bike through the fahrradweg (bicycle street) and deliver directly to the door.

When you think of safe or environmentally friendly last mile delivery, what kind of vehicles come to your mind?

It is important to remember that last mile delivery is more than just a courier business. Typically, a courier shipment means that I pick up a shipment and have it always with me until it is delivered. Within the last mile delivery sector, however, there are many other factors we have to consider, such

as food requirements or same-day delivery. Therefore, you have to consider the necessary processes involved and ask questions, like what is the most suitable vehicle? Is it a smaller, faster vehicle or is it a larger vehicle with a lot of loading capacity for volume or weight? We must also consider whether we need a two, three or four-wheeled trailer.

So, how do we ensure the rider executes a safe last mile delivery? They may need a specific training programme for a smaller vehicle or for a larger vehicle, depending on the necessary delivery processes.

For example, for large vehicles with trailers, we often have three or four-wheeled vehicles with axles and wheels parallel to each other. These require different training to vehicles with only two



Martin Schmidt (Credit: Martin Schmidt)

Public appreciation for delivery riders is missing, and this is a societal problem. People must begin to realise that they are actually booking a service and should be ready to give the delivery riders more and better recognition.

wheels. In fact, for each type of vehicle there are different rider trainings, as there may be special features for larger vehicles, which move differently to smaller vehicles.

Regarding the environment, ensuring environmentally friendly deliveries is not strictly dependent on vehicle size, but is instead related to the vehicle drive. If the vehicle drive is without an engine or motor, then it is very environmentally friendly and also healthy. But many vehicles require an electric motor. There are a lot of electric motor-assisted vehicles and pedelecs, which are still considered bicycles up to 25 km/h and 250 watts. But if the rider has heavy cargo or a heavy bike and is working in a hilly area, then 250 watts is too little.

If all of the bike motors are electrically powered, then it is supposedly environmentally friendly. One can argue that we just take electricity from wind and solar, and all will be okay. But we forgot that batteries also have to be built, and what the life cycle assessment of this is, I can't say

myself. Often when we talk about environmentally friendly last mile delivery, we are usually talking about being CO2 emission-free. Emission-free where we ride, but not emission-free where the electricity is produced.

Do you think that the demand for LMD workers outpaces supply in the labour market? How can the LMD rider profession be made more attractive?

This depends on the job market and where the delivery service is located. For example, if a service is located in Wustermark, then it's more likely to make its deliveries with diesel vehicles, but if it's in Berlin Mitte, then it's definitely worth developing a CO2 strategy.

Labour is scarce at the moment, and this has to do with the labour market policy. Many workers (and also apprentices) go to other industry segments. Yes, we have a minimum wage that is rising, but the whole wage spiral is also going up, and bicycle logistics is difficult, hard work. Therefore, we need to make the job more attractive in other ways, like instead of working

40 hours, the LMD worker may only work 35 hours, or work five days a week with seven hours instead of eight, and earn the same salary full-time. But to make this possible, the parcel companies, and also those who send parcels – the customers, would have to pay more. The postage per package would need to become higher. Currently this is quite low in Germany.

Ultimately, this is a remuneration issue. I want my people to earn at least €12 per hour. Customers have to understand that the market requires for the delivery service to be paid. If customers want to order online, then the delivery service must also be made feasible.



Bicycle courier at work (Credit: Canva)

Ultimately, this is a remuneration issue. I want my people to earn at least €12 per hour. Customers have to understand that the market requires for the delivery service to be paid. If customers want to order online, then the delivery service must also be made feasible.

Another reason why I find it difficult to find workers is that I have to find people who like this profession. They need to enjoy being outside in the city and they should enjoy being free, though they do still have someone standing behind them to help them cope with difficulties unfolding during work. They must be autonomous and responsible and they must make sure to deliver enough parcels on time, and hence be trustworthy.

On the other hand, public appreciation for delivery riders is missing, and this is a societal problem. People must begin to realise that they are actually booking a service and should be ready to give the delivery riders more and better recognition. The unfavourable image of bicycle couriers comes as a result of the current conditions: many riders may not be German and often encounter language problems. Others may not perform their job accurately to the last detail, because this is really hard work that is remunerated at very low prices.

What kind of delivery skills and competences are in high demand today?

When it comes to training, this is certainly a job that can be learned. It's not difficult having a few basic skills:

Being able to deal with the customer sensibly and communicate sensibly, and understand what the customer might see and what they don't see; what to do if it is not possible to deliver the package to them, but to the neighbour, for example; how to deal with goods; how to ride accident-free; how to deliver in a reliable shipment system (e.g., having the right app on your phone); how to navigate the city; language knowledge is very important, and riders must be communicative; care in handling the goods; being able to move safely through the traffic; be reliable and be able to work independently, as I am entrusted with the parcel and am liable for it; being technically familiar with the vehicles, e.g., being able to carry out small scale repairs.

These are the requirements when one really wants to do last mile delivery, but remember, these are more professional delivery skills and not necessarily bicycle riding skills.

Is there enough training supply for green last mile delivery safety-related skills?

Training for a week is enough. You can explain the basics with presentations and then practice. You have to do traffic education, e.g., if someone comes from

abroad and has not taken a driving test in Germany. You have to know how to ride and load a cargo bike. You can do that with an online test, like the theory test for a driver's license.

I offer unemployed people a qualification to bring them into a job, because the market is there and is continuously growing. There is a lot of work in the LMD sector and we have to make sure to train people properly – not during two years and one year of apprenticeship, but during one week or maybe two. This way you can bring new people into the job market and offer them a qualification and a recognised profession. But like I said, the image of the bicycle courier is not positive and needs to change.

In principle there is a need for good marketing and positive communication about the LMD courier to show people that the service is delivered by qualified and professional figures offering a quality service.

Thanks very much for your time, Martin.