

## Intelligent replenishment

### Service logistics

#### Dr. Acél & Partner stages 24th logistics colloquium in Zurich

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A logistics colloquium was recently held in Zurich (Switzerland)'s Technopark for the 24th time. The event has been organised for many years by the logistics consulting firm Dr Acél & Partner, in collaboration with the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich's Institute of Automated Production. This year the event focussed on service logistics.

The broad range of activities which are encapsulated in the term «service logistics» were brought starkly to the fore at the recent 24th Zurich logistics colloquium in Switzerland. Well-oiled logistics operations as a success factor are no longer restricted to industrial companies, according to Dr Peter P. Acél in his introductory speech. Intelligent replenishment of supplies is also decisive for the operation of such diverse businesses as catering companies, hospitals and aircraft spare parts suppliers. Over 40 participants availed themselves of the opportunity to hear four in part highly interesting short talks (35 minutes per speaker, plus five minutes of discussion) within the space of a single afternoon. The topics addressed various aspects of the world of logistics and service provision.

### Logistics and improvisation

Peter Gamma, owner of the luxury catering company of the same name, offered a glimpse behind the scenes of major culinary events. Three days before the Cartier Polo World Cup on Snow 2007 began in St Moritz (Switzerland), for example, he had to demonstrate his ability to improvise, when rain unexpectedly flooded the ice-covered surface of the lake. Great effort was required to provide the cosseted participants of the socialite event with food and drink on time, while keeping their feet dry in elegant tents.



Peter Gamma, CEO of Gamma Catering  
(Photo: Altermatt)

Gamma's description of the activities and experiences of a VIP caterer were impressive. Gamma Catering, headquartered in Hünenberg in Switzerland's Canton of Zug, has branch offices in Basel, Geneva and St Moritz (all Switzerland). It was established about 25 years ago and manages several subsidiaries in addition to various restaurants, with 85 full-time and 200 part-time staff. The catering service provider stands for exceptional culinary delights of the highest order, as well as for elaborate and exquisite décor, and is also known for its professional planning and organisation of catering events far beyond Switzerland's borders.

Gamma defined his conception of logistics right at the beginning of his talk. «For my company logistics primarily means precision, coordination and creativity.» Precision involves ensuring that the correct materials (such as the equipment for an entire kitchen) arrive at the right place. In addition, the flow of materials has to be perfectly coordinated. But many other factors have to be attended to for an event to be successful.

### **Detailed preparations**

The work begins the moment a customer has booked Gamma Catering for a particular occasion. Project managers, warehousing staff, decorators and florists are immediately rounded up to plan and organise the happening down to the last detail. Only large items like tents and lavatories are rented from external suppliers. Most of the required infrastructure (bars, lounges, tables, chairs, tableware and candle holders) are owned by the service provider. Gamma said that nearly a third of the turnover is generated by logistics activities.

Andreas Kunz, professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich, reported on the status of a computer simulated factory that is under development. He described it as a comprehensive network of digital models, methods and tools, such as simulations and 3-D visualisations. With the help of continuous data management, it should be possible to holistically plan, build, control and improve all essential production processes. Digital factories are not mere «hype», according to him, such tools are becoming increasingly indispensable for small and medium-sized companies.

### **Parallels**

At first glance it might appear that the tasks of replenishing medicines in a hospital and supplying spare parts for the airline industry have nothing in common. But parallels immediately became apparent from hearing the presentations by Herbert Plagge, head of the in-house pharmacy at Basel University Hospital (Switzerland), followed by Martin Bühlmann, in charge of supply chain management for SR Technics at Zurich airport (Switzerland). Both the provision of medicines and spare parts logistics call for dependable deliveries, preferably low capital commitment through skilful management of stocks, and optimal collaboration with suppliers through the use of state-of-the-art information technology.