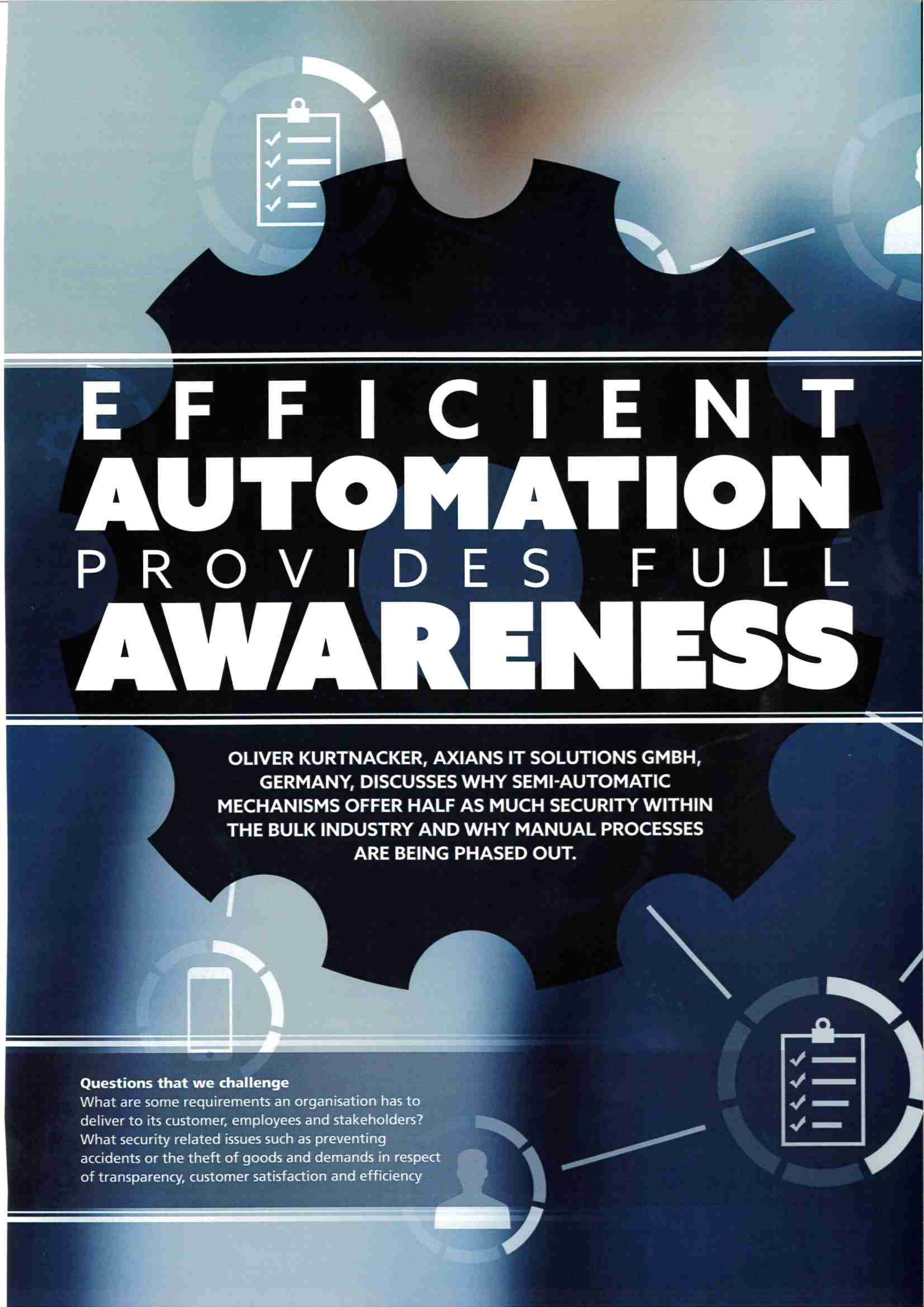
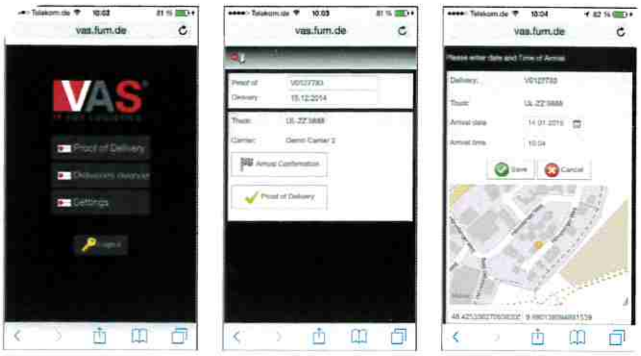


EFFICIENT AUTOMATION PROVIDES FULL AWARENESS

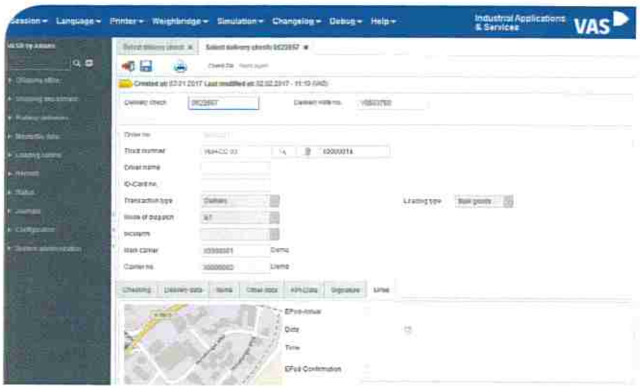
OLIVER KURTNACKER, AXIANS IT SOLUTIONS GMBH, GERMANY, DISCUSSES WHY SEMI-AUTOMATIC MECHANISMS OFFER HALF AS MUCH SECURITY WITHIN THE BULK INDUSTRY AND WHY MANUAL PROCESSES ARE BEING PHASED OUT.

Questions that we challenge

What are some requirements an organisation has to deliver to its customer, employees and stakeholders? What security related issues such as preventing accidents or the theft of goods and demands in respect of transparency, customer satisfaction and efficiency



Different views on the mobile solution of the ePOD.



Web browser view of the ePOD with geo location data.

SAMSUNG
Printer
Weighbridge
Simulation

Signature area of the ePOD included into mobile solution.

have to be discussed and are under scrutiny from the board of directors each year? Within a manufacturing plant, these questions arise in parts of the supply chain on a regular basis, in particular, in functional areas such as the management office, the delivery registration process, the IT business units and the HR department. Furthermore, plant management and shipping offices for inbound and outbound processes and loading stations have to deal these types of questions.

Reasons

Accelerated growth and changing market conditions, rising costs of customer satisfaction and keeping high quality standards of offered products and services constrain an organisation to review and restructure its infrastructure in many ways. Often seen and strongly affected by these issues are functional areas where manual intervention is required. Due to deprivation of necessity, lack of knowledge or unknown process asymmetries, it is challenging to know how to restructure and improve processes reasonably and economically.

The bird´s-eye view

Looking at these issues from a bird´s-eye perspective and taking them under surveillance in a generic way, it becomes obvious that we need to address and think about solutions to improve or solve them.

If we keep a close eye on security related topics, such as safety concepts of a plant or the theft of product after a truck has left the plant, most people do not waste much thought on if the delivery reached its final destination. Is this something the responsible stakeholder is fully aware of?

For instance, it is important that your statistics state that no accidents occurred within the past months. But, is the safety concept really a topic any stakeholder gives serious consideration to?

Truck drivers are pressed for time when they conduct business at your plant. Looking at the process flow in the plant, observing their walk from the parking area to the registration office, or how they load their trucks at the loading stations, it becomes obvious how many risks arise during their plant visit.

So, the question is: how can you as a manufacturer and supplier of bulk goods prevent accidents and thefts to protect yourself and your stakeholder? Although some bulk manufacturing plants offer semi-automated processes, such as card dispensers and self-service terminals, the accelerated growth and the combined time pressure and fast-moving nature are factors that make you think if semi-automatic mechanisms are still acceptable. Although the need for some manual processing still exists, it is definitely possible to reduce it in parts of the supply chain.

Fully aware through tracking all

The same concerns arise if we envision how transparent the business processes within our company are in respect to customer satisfaction and efficiency. The questions we should ask ourselves are, for instance: is my invoicing process transparent, efficient and quick enough and does invoicing take place soon after a delivery leaves my supply chain? In addition to the prepared daily ERP and Excel reports, how are we able to monitor all these processes without conducting a daily conference call?

Again, to take the bird´s-eye view to solve the problem objectively, an IT based automation solution provides different options. Many companies work with a web based haulier portal and invest in performance, usability and security to increase sustainability and stakeholder satisfaction to reduce the idle time of trucks and the order/registration management, to improve the planning/plant management and to eliminate redundancies by optimising parts of the supply chain and by outsourcing several entities.

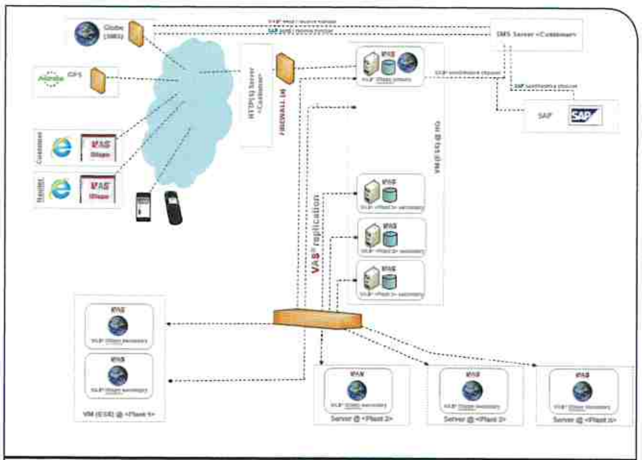
A partner portal as a problem-solving approach

A transparent and sustainable solution to these questions is to use a B2C or B2B platform, which is connected to a dispatch automation system. This system organises all technically relevant processes, such as data distribution by using web services or direct database communication and it regulates administrative functions such as planning and capturing KPI information to identify truck throughput bottlenecks. Stakeholder satisfaction is enhanced by utilising existing web security standards such as secured connections through HTTPS and firewalls to handle security concerns. External access to the applications is provided through a standard browser and authentication is secured by setting up password policies. It is SO_x compliant, which means that each password has to conform to one of the highest safety standards.

Referring again to the existing semi-automatic mechanisms, further associated risks arise with respect to the limited ability of the stakeholders to act. It becomes clear that we need to scrutinise the haulier portal even more closely in order to find further approaches that solve the problems to the stakeholders´ satisfaction.

Besides the aforementioned technical and administrative benefits that a B2C or B2B platform offers to all internal and external stakeholders, using it also provides users with an accelerated accounting process, ensures that the user is no longer bound to the opening hours of a plant, and simplifies the entire planning and organisation of the availability and allocation of resources.

Apart from business-process oriented benefits, areas such as CRM and customer bonding are strengthened and are becoming even more important. With the help of defined and customised reports, customers who have not ordered for a long time can be identified. Additionally, companies are better able to impress prospective customers by offering 24/7 service.



Technical overview of the partner portal and plant connections.

The introduction of a web portal automatically reduces all processes that have so far taken time, money, and materials, such as contracting entities that are dependent upon the opening hours of the plant, slow or creeping accounting processes for suppliers, consignee and possibly third parties, and unnecessary paperwork.

Theft is unfortunately omnipresent

It may happen that deliveries do not arrive at the desired destination area and neither the customer, the carrier or the plant staff know where the bulk goods are. Because of that, let us face security questions such as stealing and tracking deliveries.

Investing in an electronic proof of delivery (ePOD) feature allows you to be fully aware of the delivery status, the current position of the shipment and the final delivery to protect yourself and all related stakeholders. The ePOD module enables dedicated individuals to monitor a shipment, after the truck has left the plant. By logging into a web browser, the user can access the dispatch automation system and is able to review the shipment details at any time from any place. The HTML5 based user interface allows access to the application through mobile devices, tablets and desktop computers.

The truck driver is able to request a delivery signature on the screen of the mobile device, which is connected to the backend database and allocated to the concerned shipment. Furthermore, it is possible to pinpoint the geographical location of the shipment by including GPS data. The ePOD module enables two major advantages: the customer is fully informed of the shipment at any time and it increases the overall security within the supply chain management process. The accounting process is also accelerated. That the manufacturer receives an electronic confirmation immediately after the delivery is received by the customer enable the automatic and immediate generation of the invoice.

For Axians IT Solutions Industrial Application Services (IAS) group, the discussed issues arise on a regular basis when talking to clients. With the help of the backend database solution, including the mentioned components, customers come together with the company to provide a safer, more digital and more transparent future.

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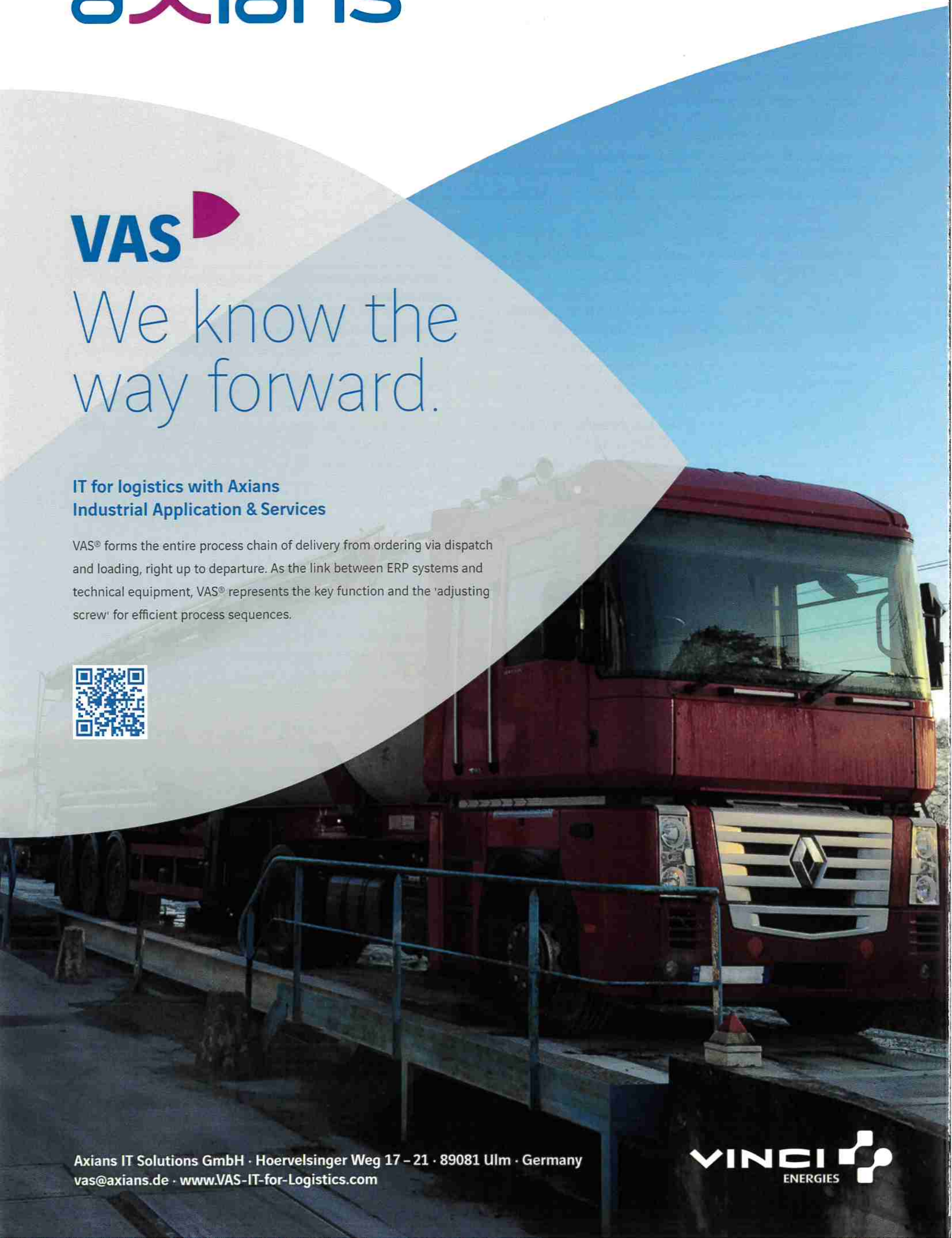

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