

The Australian

Electronic letterbox could boost online shopping

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TZ Limited's electronic mailbox, ourPAD

Source: Supplied

ENTREPRENEUR and Celebrity Apprentice host Mark Bouris believes he has reinvented the humble letterbox for the internet age ... at least in theory.

But he concedes it will take at least 12 months for the idea to come to fruition while a distribution partner is found.

Mr Bouris said home deliveries were problematic as consumers have to adhere to the schedules of parcel delivery companies which usually falls during office hours.

Letterboxes are not designed to fit parcels, which are much more common now due to the popularity of online shopping.

"The letterbox has become redundant other than for bad news," Mr Bouris said. "It's been 208 years since the last upgrade to the letterbox."

Yesterday he unveiled his solution, a prototype of the ourPAD, a secure parcel locker that allows people to take delivery of online purchases when they aren't at home.

Mr Bouris hopes ourPad can complete the "last mile of delivery" for internet shoppers who want "instant gratification" after making a purchase, instead of waiting for days on end for their goods.

The locker size can vary, but is built to hold at least three bags loads of groceries or half a shopping cart.

Once a parcel is delivered, a notification is sent via SMS or email.

OurPAD was developed by technology firm TZ Limited, where Mr Bouris is executive chairman.

It is temperature-controlled by sensors to handle perishable items. People can use their smartphones to remotely control the temperature, but to do this the locker needs to use the home owner's wireless internet connection or a SIM card.

The locker also consumes energy which means it will have to source power from the home owner's property.

The device can be secured in many ways, from a smartcard to PIN, and will be available in a range of materials to suit any type of building, from landed properties to apartment blocks.

Delivery workers will be also be issued with smartcards or PINs to access the electronic mailbox.

TZ Limited president and CEO John Wilson accepts that privacy and security issues are bound to be raised with external parties having access to the device, coupled with ourPAD's backend system that can collect data on consumer's spending pattern based on the parcels delivered.

"There's no question we might upset a few people if we don't get the strategy right," Mr Wilson said.

Mr Bouris said pricing would be determined when the distribution network, including partners, were confirmed.

TZ could partner with an ISP to bundle ourPad as part of the monthly home internet package.

Other possible partners include Australia Post, Fedex, Toll Holdings, DHL, Google or Telstra.

"We've developed the technology but we need partners to roll this out," Mr Bouris said.

He expects it to take a year to establish partners and price, test and market the product.

One analyst who declined to be named said the idea should be lauded but getting it off the ground would be a tough ask.

"Price will be key. Also communicating the benefits to home owners will be important," the analyst said.

"I can't see people ripping out their letterboxes to fit this in anytime soon ... who will bear that cost?"

Australia Post is already trialling TZ's basic electronic parcel lockers in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.
