

The bakery determines the final quality again

Master Bakers Grobe GmbH & Co. KG has used vacuum conditioning for nearly five years. Final quality is defined by the production unit, and the sales department avoids the hectic morning rush.

+ According to Jürgen Hinkelmann, Managing Partner of Master Bakers Grobe GmbH & Co. KG: “Buying the vacuum plants was one of the best investments in the past ten years.” The decisions to do this originated five years ago, after paying a nighttime visit to the Brotmacher bakery in Klingenberg, where vacuum conditioning plants from the Swiss company Cetravac AG were already in use. The rolls and croissants which the Dortmund businessman was able to see there left an impression on him. He is still enthusiastic about it today, and says “The quality was entirely different,” and remained so even after bringing them out of the car back in Dortmund. “The croissants were still crisp, and the chocolate chips in them literally floated in the dough, instead of just creating a slimy mess underneath.” A breakfast with his wife and daughter in Klingenberg convinced the family of the impression of freshness created by the bread rolls, even after several hours, which led him to present his idea of introducing vacuum conditioning into the bakery to the monthly ERFA (Management Information Exchange) group of branch managers. “We view such decision-making processes rather like a team sport.”

The group was skeptical. Until then, the company’s own logistics service had delivered all the bread rolls as dough pieces to the Bake-Cafés, where they were put into the oven as required. Some group members thought taking this decision away from the specialist shops was a big risk, while others saw the workload and stress on the sales staff in the early hours of the morning. The decision was for “both at the same time”: one half of the demand was to continue to arrive as dough pieces, the other as fully-baked, vacuum-conditioned bread rolls.

Then, six weeks later, came the unanimous recognition by the sales staff that the special bread rolls from the bakery in particular were noticeably better than those produced by the instore ovens. Only special vacuum-conditioned rolls have been delivered to the specialist shops since then, and now muffins, tray cakes, flatbreads and bread rolls for topping, baguettes supplied par-baked, bread roll rings and many other things pass through the vacuum plant. As Hinkelmann says: “I am certain we have not yet reached the limit of our ideas about everything it can be used for.”

The vacuum cells have changed the workflows, and are not just additional machines in the bakery. Because the first vacuum plant quickly became a “bottleneck”, the installation was enlarged to five rack positions designed as a push-



++ Jürgen Hinkelmann

through plant to separate bread roll production and dispatch. Four racks were also added to enlarge the range of ovens.

The combination saves time. According to Hinkelmann: “Nowadays we need 40 minutes from vacuum cell to order-picking. Since then, the entire bread roll production operation has started one and a half hours later.” The dispatch operation also needed to be re-planned. Where previously there was space in the delivery truck for 36 boards, nowadays there are thirteen baskets with fully-baked, vacuumed bread rolls, i.e. one third fewer products.

Hinkelmann arranges for Cetravac’s master bakers to visit twice a year to train the bakery staff, to optimize applications and to develop correct procedures to expand the product range. “As a rule, we alter the baking program, not the vacuum cells controller, when the air humidity and temperatures change.” Equally important, perhaps, is the fact that the bakers identify with the system that has given them back the ability to influence final quality. Hinkelmann: “Nowadays, we have process reliability that is close to the optimum.”

There are no longer any complaints about soft bread rolls, either from their own specialist shops or from major consumers. According to Hinkelmann: “Vacuum conditioning has also proved a blessing for Sunday bread rolls. On Sundays, we must supply just as many products in a shorter time, and just as good quality as on weekdays, and that would be significantly more difficult than without vacuum.”

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