

CASE STUDY

Contract Packaging, Using New Machines and Social Components

Contract packaging is a logistical services outsourcing sector that is gaining in significance. Contract packagers now offer highly professional and yet cost effective packaging solutions. They offer a tried and tested alternative for companies with few economically reasonable incentives to expand their own packaging lines and with bottlenecks in their efforts to carry out their packaging using in-house resources during peak production periods. Furthermore, contract packaging provides far more than the mere packaging of products. Contract packagers working under contract with customers often also take care of necessary warehousing and freight-forwarding services.

Outsourcing this service would make even more sense if it delivered a social impact on top of a positive financial outcome. This opportunity is now being offered by specialized workshops for people with disabilities.

In the Saxon city of Glauchau the Lebensbrücke workshop is working on this assignment as a part of the West Saxony social welfare service. It is part of Saxony's working committee of workshops for people with disabilities. In West Saxony alone they provide a wide variety of products and services for roughly 15,000 people with disabilities.

One of the Glauchau Workshop services is contract packaging. Up to 1.5 million packaging jobs are completed there annually, and the trend is growing. The workshop has also taken over the transport of the products and the packaged items. The largest client is a globally operating sanitation products manufacturer. Up until two years ago products were packed into pouches by hand in Glauchau. Given the constant rise in jobs, though, the demand for use of modern baggers cropped up. "We had been discussing the issue of acquiring baggers for a rather long time," says Bernd Köhler, the workshop production head. "At the "intec" trade fair we finally saw the Automated Packaging Systems packaging technology. It appeared to suit our purposes, so we requested a demonstration and test of the technology in our workshop. The test won us over completely and we purchased the first machine featuring a product feed device. Last year we ordered an additional machine for our workshop, also featuring a product feed device."

The Autobag® AB 180™ bagger the Glauchau workshop ordered is a pouch bagger. It can operate either semi-automatically or automatically and pack up to 80 pouches per minute. It processes Autobag "bags-on-a-roll" in widths of 2" to 11" and lengths of 2.5" to 22". The machine is equipped with a touch screen for operation and stands out for its simple, secure and quick mode of operation. Bernd Köhler explains, "We are particularly liable whenever our co-workers with disabilities work on machines. For this reason, safe handling and simple operation of the machine were just as important as its high performance level when we made our decision. We haven't had any problems so far with our co-workers' day-to-day use of this machine."

Company Name

Lebensbrücke Social Welfare Workshop

Equipment Used

Autobag® AB 180™

Materials Used

Autobag® Bags-on-a-Roll

Return on Investment

"The rise in the number of contracts we have won proves that we are on the right track," says Bernd Köhler. "Our use of packaging technology has increased our workshop's packing performance fivefold."



In Glauchau, four different product specific pouch formats are used depending on the number and volume of products to be packaged. Switching the pouch format with Autobag bags-on-a-roll just requires a short series of simple hand movements.

The AB 180 has a job memory and an integrated help and diagnostic function. This software assists the operator in detecting errors and operational conditions such as printing, a missing pouch or reaching the preset quantity. It then logs the errors, correcting them if necessary, and identifies components that have failed.

The diagnostic system lowers downtime incidents and also enables inexperienced operating staff to quickly diagnose system problems. A help function detects problems and even recommends solutions for them. Service technicians make it possible for interfaces to perform firmware updates easily. Information and settings can be copied to a PC or transferred to another device, ideal for the use of multiple devices.

In Glauchau the AB 180 baggers were all combined with a "Maximizer" product feed system. The continuously running belt conveys and counts manually introduced objects at speeds of up to 70 lots per minute. Compared with manual loading alone, the productivity rate doubles.

When going through the Autobag AB 180 bagging system the operator places the items on a product loading area. Next the products needed for the individual packing process are put into a compartment on the Maximizer conveyor belt. The conveyor belt carries the product to the loading area using a field recognition sensor. At that point the conveyor belt unloads the items and takes them to a collection funnel. After that, the product lot is directed through the funnel into a pouch that a stream of air has already opened. The pouch is then sealed and transported away, while a new lot and a new pouch is made ready for filling. In Glauchau a scale integrated into the packaging procedure constantly ensures pouches containing multiple similar products or product sets are filled properly by checking the weight.

The bagging system the Glauchau workshop uses helped improve the working conditions of the disabled people employed there and simultaneously reasonably increased demands on them. It also yielded a solid financial impact: "The rise in the number of contracts we have won proves that we are on the right track," says Bernd Köhler. "Our use of packaging technology has increased our workshop's packing performance fivefold."

The Lebensbrücke Social Welfare Workshop is an interesting example of the work disabled people perform no longer simply being something to keep them occupied, but rather meaningful participation in society. Their workshops are also increasingly becoming employers and reliable economic partners in the region and beyond.

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