





Robotic solution boosts gourmet chocolate manufacturer

A small confectionery entrepreneur has found robotic automation to provide a profitable and very flexible packaging line. This highly efficient line accommodates a wide range of packaging configurations to supply the mass market.

Efficient packaging for national account

In three short years, Eric Bochner, owner of Bochner Chocolates, has grown his business from a modest gourmet and fine chocolate shop to attracting the attention of national retail accounts. He has now landed a national chain account to distribute an exclusive line of fine chocolates.

Bochner owns and operates his main retail confectionery store, in Coralville, Iowa, for his signature line of tantalizing treats. This consists of assorted boxed chocolates, covered nuts and fruits, a gourmet coffee line, and three-ounce premium chocolate bars with high quality whole inclusions which is his fastest growing line.

Not your ordinary confectionery entrepreneur, Bochner holds a law degree,

as well as one in physics. In turning to food, one of his other interests, Bochner attended pastry school in Chicago and found a knack for confectionery work. He then became focused on making high-quality confectionery in scalable, lower cost ways.

“Entrepreneurs like to develop good ideas, to make or create something new, exciting and successful,” says Bochner. He continues, “Our first two years were an investment in research and development. My signature products were doing quite well, but I was ready to grow.”

It did not take Bochner long to strike a deal with a national retail account to manufacture an exclusive line of designer chocolates. Although Bochner Chocolates has a highly efficient staff of 20 employees, it became time to invest in



Up to 16 incoming product lanes on Dobby **Paloma** robot increases packaging process by more than 75%

automated equipment to handle the new account.

Flexibility made simple

“The national retail account was a fantastic opportunity to use our existing capabilities and allow us to creatively scale our operation further,” admits Bochner. He adds, “My initial purpose for efficient packaging equipment was driven by the necessity to package high volumes of seasonal products in very short timelines. As it is difficult to acquire, train and retain high quality workers, we were prompted to consider substantial packaging automation. Our investment had to solve a wide variety of packaging challenges and it was exciting to work with Dobby and see the concept develop.”

The automated line consists of a Dobby **Paloma Feed Placer** two-arm robot and a Dobby **Linium 301** horizontal flow wrapper. Determining how all the

product needed to be picked, oriented and placed was no small feat, because nearly every product is in some sort of variety pack of different flavors, designs or shapes and has to be placed in different tray configurations. The packaging line also had to single wrap the new three-ounce chocolate bars. To handle the various packaging combinations, the **Paloma** robot independently controls and picks from 16 incoming lanes. Each lane has its own cross belt conveyor and pneumatic row pusher to load a different type of chocolate in each lane. Two wider conveyors are dedicated for the chocolate bar input when production is needed.

The **Paloma** robot holds a range of recipes and provides advanced vision tracking to pick, orientate, and place into a tray. Bochner worked with Dobby to develop a vision tracking system to orient the art on the face of the chocolates, independent of the outline of the product.

From the **Paloma** robot, the trays and chocolate bars are fed to a Dobby **Linium 301** horizontal flow wrapper. The **Linium 301** wrapper infeed offers adjustable width to accommodate various product sizes. Dobby’s **Linium 301** wrapper offers the option of manual, semi-automatic or fully-automatic feeding. The **Linium 301**’s servo driven infeed conveyor interfaces with the **Paloma Feed Placer** robot by controlling the speed of the wrapper, which provides variable speed, based on product flow, with incredible accuracy.

Automation increases production

After the initial purchase of the Dobby packaging line, Bochner calculated output would greatly increase with the new packaging line. “I’m still amazed!” exclaims Bochner. The new line allowed Bochner Chocolates to fill its second large order in less than half the usual time.

“I have a high level of confidence in the Dobby robot and wrapper,” says Bochner. So high, that Bochner recently accepted a contract with a second national retail account.



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