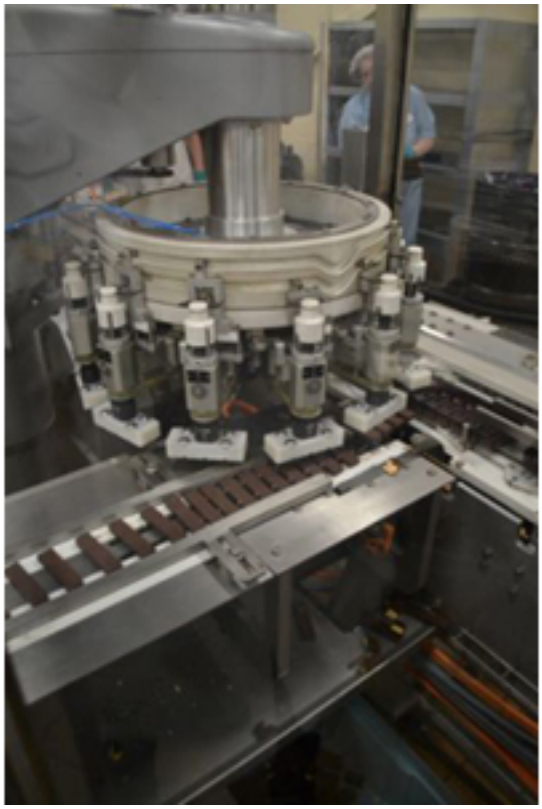
This Cookie Doesn’t Crumble



Voortman Cookies Limited has seen its share of consumer trends and market changes. Now based in Burlington, Ontario in Canada, the international cookie manufacturer has grown quite a bit from its humble roots in the 1950s, after brothers Bill and Harry Voortman immigrated from the Netherlands with their family’s recipes. The company now employs approximately 300 people who help distribute its cookies, turnovers, wafers and more to stores in more than 50 countries around the world.

Crucial in its success to grow and build its brand through the years has been Voortman’s ability to anticipate changing consumer taste with smart product development efforts, and this most certainly includes the current health craze. Its burgeoning line of “Healthier Choice!” selections is designed for the growing number of consumers who monitor their diets, but do not wish to sacrifice taste.

To grow this product line, Voortman sought an efficient packaging solution that would preserve the product quality of its new Sugar-Free Chocolate Wafers and an innovative way to deliver it to consumers all over the world.

New Product, New Package, Innovative System

The Voortman marketing team determined that the new sugar-free product should be placed in trays for optimal product quality. When Voortman needed a packaging solution tailored to make its latest idea a commercial reality, it turned to partner Bosch Packaging Technology.

After consulting with Voortman and assessing the packaging needs specific to the chocolate-enrobed wafers, Bosch developed a system anchored by its intelligent feeding wheel (Sigpack FWI) tray-loading technology, to promote the cost-effective production Voortman sought, while also optimizing the presentation of the product. The concept of the intelligent feeding wheel Sigpack FWI is innovative, yet simple: The wheel spins, picks up four wafers at a time and precisely places them in a tray.

This simplicity, combined with high performance, made the Sigpack FWI more conducive to the new project’s packaging demands and budget than hand- or robotic tray-loading. Voortman concluded that hand-loading the trays was not an option because of the anticipated labor cost, and the feeding wheel used less floor space than the robotic equipment.

“The intelligent feeding wheel solution was a super efficient method to accomplish the task and carried a strong payback,” said Jeff Downer, president of Charles Downer & Co. Ltd., Bosch’s representative in Canada.

“It would have taken an army of hands to pack the cookies manually,” agreed Fred Heikamp, plant and property manager, Voortman.

Why It Works

The Sigpack FWI was developed by Bosch for chocolate industry applications. Gentle product handling is ensured even at maximum speed by running the line’s vacuum gripper and product flow at equivalent speeds during pick-and-place operations. This protection of product quality was important for Voortman, a company that has continually prided itself on enduring consumer satisfaction.

Able to be used for primary or secondary packaging, the Sigpack FWI can guide, rotate, group, accelerate or transfer up to three products simultaneously, also enabling the technology to meet Voortman’s goals for productivity and efficiency. It handles more than 800 chocolate-enrobed wafers per minute and produces more than 3,000 ready-to-ship packages every hour. And each and every cookie is placed with the utmost precision.

“The wheel doesn’t just move in one motion. It pauses and moves sideways according to the location of the tray. It’s very precise and there’s a tremendous amount of engineering that Bosch had to do for it to function,” said Heikamp.

Wheel System, Wheel Results

Critical for efficient production of Voortman’s Sugar-Free Chocolate Wafers is that all components of the system work together seamlessly.

The Bosch system includes a product distribution system and a tray denester, as well as the Sigpack FWI trayloader and the Sigpack HBM flow wrapper. The head-of-line system detects the rows and precisely aligns rows of wafers. The product is distributed through the row-removal system to the intelligent feeding wheel, which

places the wafers into the trays. The final tray contains 16 wafers — two layers of eight in individual cavities.

All components of the system must perform reliably and in sync. The tray denester plays a critical role, consistently feeding empty trays for cookie placement to avoid slowing down the line or causing stoppages: "In order for the line to run efficiently, you have to have that empty tray there every time and Bosch did a good job at engineering that," said Heikamp.

Finally, the Sugar-Free Chocolate Wafer trays are wrapped in film using a Sigpack HBM flow wrapper. The HBM flow wrapper creates a gusseted package — tucking in the ends for sealing, making it more in line with the width of the actual product and leaving no fins sticking out. The package makes case packing — which is done by hand — easier and lends itself to efficient presentation.

Additionally, the flexible system promotes future expansion, making it possible for Voortman to double production as consumer demand dictates. Not only is product changeover possible, but it is also both fast and simple, allowing the company to ramp up from the original product variety to now three flavors.

Dependable Solution

With a new pack style, packaging equipment and product for the health-conscious sweets craver, Voortman can continue meeting the demand for its wholesome, yet tasty, confectionery treats.

"It's a well designed package and it's selling well. The wrap is tight, and we like the graphics," said Heikamp.

Whatever the next craze is for consumers, Voortman knows it has a reliable partner by its side with Bosch Packaging Technology, which can supply the necessary expertise and equipment tailored to the project's budget.

For more information, please contact Jeff Downer, President of Charles Downer & Co. Ltd., Bosch Packaging Technology Sales Agent, at 905.882.2222 or jdowner@cdowner.com [1], or visit www.boschpackaging.com [2].

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