

inter **FACE**

# Automate to Percolate

HIGH-END COFFEE REQUIRES GENTLE HANDLING, BUT MANUAL PACKAGING ULTIMATELY PROVES MORE COSTLY THAN AN AUTOMATED SOLUTION.

**P**roduct packaging is the Achilles heel for most coffee roasters. Designing and producing the core product can be almost as challenging as determining how to best package it for sale/resale. With extensive, labor heavy manual lines, Luna Roasters Gourmet Coffee & Tea Company President Jason Barrow found himself seeking the ideal packaging automation to meet volume demands, while exceeding quality goals.

**Challenge:** *Profitably scale gourmet roast-to-order specialty coffee roaster/manufacturer needing to meet growing national demands, while keeping quality goals in check.*

**Solution:** *Identify and study labor-intensive production jobs, then research and design a scalable/integrated infrastructure.*

“For over 13 years, Luna Roasters Gourmet Coffee & Tea Company has provided hand-crafted, specialty grade coffees, espresso, gourmet syrups and loose leaf teas for avid connoisseurs nationally. Founded in Denver, Colo., Luna Roasters is a socially conscious company offering a full line of gourmet wholesale and retail products, and a host of white-glove private label, product creation and other value-added commercial services. Luna is a high-end ‘roast to order’ coffee roaster/manufacturer with high volume

capabilities. For Luna, the customer experience, product quality and freshness are paramount in every cup.

Grown 3,200 feet above sea level in tropical climates around the world, specialty grade Arabica coffee is a high-end, agricultural based, semi-dried seed of the *Coffea Arabica Plant*. Arabica coffees are hand picked, de-pulped, dried, roasted, ground, added to hot water and enjoyed globally in a variety of ways from the traditional hot cup of morning joe to iced mocha lattes and everything in between.

Much care is given to these precious beans from seed to cup. Once a coffee roaster

receives a new batch of beans, it is critical to handle them correctly and package the finished product in air, light and moisture-tight solutions to maintain freshness.

When it was time for Luna to scale operations to meet the demands of a growing global coffee market, a lot of attention was first spent on identifying and understanding the critical manufacturing challenges. Product packaging was identified as a key area to improve. Historically, coffee packaging was completed in a labor intensive, manual or semi-automated fashion requiring three times the number of line resources as a fully integrated, automated packaging solution.

From the first meeting about automating our packaging line to full implementation took about nine months. Our biggest challenge was to implement packaging automation to meet current and future volume demands with our custom made, multi-layer, stand-up, gourmet bags with a one-way air valve while exceeding set quality goals. High quality packaging is critical to protecting and preserving fresh roasted specialty coffees. We needed to scale, but were not willing to jeopardize

the customer experience or compromise quality to achieve it.

There was no getting around the facts, packaging labor is expensive to bring on board and maintain and packaging waste is extremely expensive when the raw materials used are higher quality than



Manual bagging was eliminated with WeighPack's Swiftly Bagger.

the industry norm. Needless to say, in this economy there were a lot of companies ready to offer a host of packaging solutions ranging from the less-expensive, low-thrill, simple to implement options to the lavish, more expensive, modular-based, option-filled mega giants. Our packaging needs were somewhere in between these two extremes. We were motivated by our budget, but more importantly by the ability to handle our custom bags within our implementation schedule.

We found multiple companies willing to design a custom manufacturing solution from scratch. Once implemented and tuned, it was promised that these custom solutions would work perfectly for our specialized production needs. The only drawback was we had to be willing to spend six to 18 months learning, designing and refining, often with an undetermined final price tag and timeframe. Once put into place however, serviceability and general maintenance can be challenging with custom built, one-off solutions. On the other end of the spectrum there are many companies out there willing to sell you their canned packaging



solutions, if you are willing and able to change the style, make up and often suppliers of your custom packaging mediums. These options are great, if your packaging solution is supported by these types of machines.

In specialized manufacturing, there is not always an immediate solution to pull off the shelf and plug in 'as is.' If you do your research and have a bit of luck, you can usually find a base unit that addresses 90 to 95 percent of your

tionality, ease-of-use, budget and availability. Our quality standards are extremely high and our accept/reject target parameters are within a few grams.

WeighPack's Swiftly Bagger was capable of processing the majority of bag sizes needed in our high volume operations with reliable accuracy. Its CombiScale allows for high accuracy at high speeds with easy service and cleanout procedures between product runs. Even with packaging solutions that are propriety and innovative, they utilize a lot of standard parts and suppliers. So, getting parts and service locally isn't too difficult. When WeighPack arrived on site, we identified an internal lead team leader, asked a lot of questions and gleaned as much troubleshooting knowledge as we could. In the beginning, our production waste was extremely high. After a few weeks of internal usage, fine tuning and customization, we were able to reduce our reject/error rate to less than three percent.



WeighPack's Swiftly Bagger (right) and CombiScale (below) offered the versatility to handle multiple bag sizes at accurate volumes.

requirements and the remaining five to 10 percent requires on-site customization. After much external research and internal requirement refinement, we looked at a few different companies. WeighPack's automated packaging solutions stood out from the rest in func-

With production line automation and integration, we are able to exceed volume and quality requirements with a fraction of the packaging resources required in the manual model." **PMT**

**Jason Barrow**

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