

iTRAK boosts throughput in a smaller package



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Ask any packaging industry professional what would be on their wish list for contemporary packaging machinery, and you'll get a long list of functional requirements.

In addition to their bespoke needs, you will see the usual suspects: flexibility, higher throughput, smaller footprint, agility for simple & rapid changeovers and, of course, the all-important connectivity.

Delivering these features has always been a bit of a balancing act. OEMs have to make trade-offs; sacrificing or diminishing one feature for another based on the specific application's requirements.

To please all comers, a machine's core architecture has to be as flexible and adaptable as possible. Enabling technologies are key in these situations; technologies that allow OEMs to realize their visions, while giving their customers the most effective and flexible solution to their production needs.

This issue was faced by **CWM Automation**, a UK company that is part of the Hexadex Group. CWM specializes in filling, heat sealing and lidding machinery for applications in dairy, convenience foods, bakery, pharmaceutical and cosmetics.

With such a broad market base - with a commensurate level of product variety - the creation of a core machine concept can be tough, especially if the architecture is not designed around delivering maximum flexibility.



iTRAK intelligent track system

"We have long-time customers that come to us and trust us to come up with solutions for their production needs," explains Mick Williams, Managing Director, CWM. "They explain the issues and we look for solutions – which is how much of the market works.

"However, thanks to the deployment of the iTRAK® Intelligent Track System (ITS) from Rockwell Automation, we can now turn this process on its head. Instead of customers approaching us with an issue and us designing a bespoke solution, we can now be more proactive, pushing our **CWM 240i** machine to the market, knowing that the majority of production challenges across multiple industries are already addressed."

The iTRAK technology has allowed CWM to develop a core architecture that targets the primary requirements for multiple packaging, filling and lidding applications. With regards to flexibility and agility, the iTRAK ITS is based on linear servo technology, that offers a near infinite number of motion profiles. By replacing chains, sprockets and fixed-pitch transfer conveyors and pockets (with all the associated mechanical wear), users can precisely tailor their machines for almost any style of production run. And not just for their current needs, but for the future, too.

"Our CWM 240i has only got 14 slats and platens in groups of two," Williams explains, "as opposed to 70 or 80, which is typical on a traditional conveyor system. These 14 are also quick release, so product changeovers are very straightforward and far quicker – as little as 10 minutes. Product changeovers on traditional linear machines would require from more effort, time and engineering."

Throughput is also boosted, with the 240i delivering an output equivalent to a much larger eight-lane linear machine, which would also be more expensive. "The independent operation of the iTRAK movers means we can deliver machines that are as flexible as our rotary solutions, but faster than our traditional linear machines," he explains, "and all of this has been achieved in a smaller overall footprint. In fact, to get the same rate of output, a traditional linear machine would have to be significantly longer."

The modular design of the machine's framework also gives CWM the ability to design in free space, so there is room for adaptability for the future, knowing that the automation technology is already in place to meet these needs.

Connectivity is a major part of the mix, too, as Williams explains: "The machine is fully networked, so we can exploit the data capabilities of the Rockwell Automation technology to share pertinent real-time operational information with ERP systems, even down to individual slat movements.

"Analytics can then be deployed to develop even greater efficiencies," he adds. "This connectivity also gives us the ability deliver remote maintenance and real-time diagnostics, and it is laying the foundations for the future deployment of augmented reality, which is already revolutionizing machine design, operation and maintenance."

Modern demands require modern solutions. To add substance to visions, you need technology that allows you to realize your idea's potential – both now and in the future – without adding complexity. By combining Rockwell Automation's technical expertise, with its own in-house machine design capabilities, CWM has bought its vision to life and, in the process, set a new benchmark in packaging technology.

Williams concludes: "Our customers have asked for more flexibility, more scope for different container sizes, increased speed, shorter run times, reduced footprints, quicker changeovers, improved hygiene and simplified maintenance. Thanks to the iTRAK technology, we have been able to deliver on all fronts!"

For more information:

CWM Automation Ltd.

Phone: +44 (0)1427 614 222

Email: sales@cwm-automation.com

<https://cwm-automation.com/>

Connect with us.    

rockwellautomation.com

expanding **human possibility**

AMERICAS: Rockwell Automation, 1201 South Second Street, Milwaukee, WI 53204-2496 USA, Tel: (1) 414.382.2000, Fax: (1) 414.382.4444

EUROPE/MIDDLE EAST/AFRICA: Rockwell Automation NV, Pegasus Park, De Kleetlaan 12a, 1831 Diegem, Belgium, Tel: (32) 2 663 0600, Fax: (32) 2 663 0640

ASIA PACIFIC: Rockwell Automation, Level 14, Core F, Cyberport 3, 100 Cyberport Road, Hong Kong, Tel: (852) 2887 4788, Fax: (852) 2508 1846

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