

Bringing the benefits of automation to fragile confectionery and cereals



Products with brittle shells such as dragées or chocolate-coated cereals can now be rapidly packed without significant collision damage thanks to a unique Ishida multihead weigher design.

Applying the coating of a typical dragée-type sweet requires time and the skilled use of special enrobing machines. However hard the final coating may seem, it is quite fragile: a fall of 30cm is enough to practically ensure that the dragée will break or at least crack.

Seeking efficiencies

The Sucralliance subsidiary of the major confectionery group CEMOI, looking for ways to manufacture these traditional products more cost-effectively, decided that it was in the areas of weighing and packing that new efficiencies could be found. However, these are precisely the areas where conventional automation was most likely to damage the dragées.

At its famous Coppelia factory in Chambéry, northeast of Grenoble, the company partnered with Ishida to devise a new automated packing line. Ishida was tasked with finding and installing a weighing solution, helping to draw up the overall line specification and handling staff training.

Determination to succeed

The company is offering dragées with both almond and chocolate centres, in a variety of multicoloured assortments as part of their drive to develop a market which many other manufacturers have already abandoned owing to the fluctuations in demand and the cost of production. Production at Coppelia is of the order of 500 tonnes per year, although this is only 7% of the overall output of the site, which also includes liqueur chocolates, fruit jellies and products containing almond paste.

The plant covers 15,000m² and employs 240 people, with seasonal workers coming in when required. It is IFS (International Food Standards) certified to version 5.

A unique solution

The Ishida team took the time to conduct exhaustive tests with the Coppelia products, using different weighers and drop distances.

The weighing solution chosen was an Ishida multihead weigher in which the weigh hoppers are arranged in a straight line (not unlike the Ishida Fresh Food Weigher) and in which drop distances have been minimised and crucial contact surfaces coated with shock-absorbing material.

Product perfection

This special machine is proving very effective. As Alain Collet, Production Director, puts it, "The dragées don't actually fall, they run downwards along a gentle 45° slope."

The result is that 99.5% of the sweets are unbroken and free of cracks, which accords exactly with the original specification.

The benefits of automation

Coppelia is experiencing this level of product quality while fully reaping the benefits of automation that had originally prompted it to invest, including speeds of up to 50 packs per minute (150g pack).

A versatile tool for fragile products

Coppelia is already using the new line for other confectionery with fragile coatings, such as 'quail eggs' and 'seagull eggs', as well as for products as different as chocolate-coated malted cereal.

A real team effort

"We are very grateful for the support Ishida has given us at different stages: defining the final specification based on our brief, organising production and training our people." says Alain Collet.



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