

Speeding up Honeytop's pancake production

How ABB robots are helping Honeytop Speciality Foods Ltd improve productivity and hygienic conditions

ABB's robotic technology has helped transform the production of pancakes at the Honeytop Speciality Food Ltd plant, by the installation of two lines each utilising four FlexPicker IRB 360 robots for the picking and stacking of pancakes. The solution, designed, built and installed by ABB's channel partner – **RG Luma**, ensures the company can meet its own stringent requirements for the hygienic handling of food, as well as introducing reduced labour costs and improved health and safety levels at the 120,000 square foot manufacturing plant in Dunstable, Bedfordshire.

Honeytop Speciality Foods Ltd, the UK's leading privately owned Naan bread producer and Europe's leading volume manufacturer of speciality flatbreads, produces more than 100,000 artisanal breads an hour. Recognising the need to improve productivity, the food specialist approached **RG Luma** – suppliers of industrial automation, special purpose machines and robotic integration – with the requirement for new automated production lines to help improve hygienic conditions at the plant and increase flexibility for the production of pancakes.

Speaking about the robots, William Eid, Director for Honeytop Speciality Foods Ltd, comments: "When we first began talks with RG Luma regarding this production line, we had some reservations about the robots and whether they could help introduce the flexibility and reliability we needed."

"We work in a industry with very tight turnaround times. We receive daily orders that are expected to be out to the depots within 12 hours of production. We needed to improve productivity, hygienic standards and increase the speed of the production line to meet these industry demands, all while reducing downtime."

By working closely with RG Luma, Honeytop Speciality Foods outlined the range of products required for production. The answer was to introduce flexibility; speed and quality with four FlexPicker robots, capable of handling 110 picks per minute to ensure all pancakes are picked and stacked quickly and precisely.

Forming part of a bigger solution for Honeytop Speciality Foods Ltd, the FlexPicker robots are connected, via conveyor belts, to a standalone, automated hot plate production line that produces large quantities of batter-based products, including light and fluffy Amercian pancakes. The conveyor belt, operates in a waterfall pattern, helping reduce the pancakes to room temperature following cooking, before preparing them for stacking and packing.

All pancakes are manually checked before entering the robot enclosure where the pancakes are picked and stacked in piles (of selectable height dependant on product) onto one central outfeed conveyor.

The enclosure is spilt into four areas of operation, enabling the robots to operate in alternative areas to the preceding robot on the line. The result is four ABB FlexPicker robots, evenly spaced out, each manning one section of the conveyor. This load-sharing system comes complete with a buffer system, designed by RG Luma, to enable the robots to keep pancakes on the buffer shelve until a short stack is identified. This buffer system also helps to reduce waste levels as the right stack of products is produced on the central outfeed conveyor.

Complementing the FlexPickers is ABB's proven PickMaster 3.2 software and its IRC5 controller. ABB's PickMaster 3.2 software offers greatly simplified programming, enabling users to model for applications and optimise multiple robot installations. For Honeytop, the use of the PickMaster 3.2 helps monitor progress on the line, including the total number of picks and can be used to quickly change production from one product to another. RG Luma has also created a secondary control system to work alongside ABB PickMaster 3.2 to vary the outfeed conveyor speed to prevent short stacks or overflows.

Integrated with the PickMaster 3.2 software are four-gigabit Ethernet cameras. These are mounted in front of each robot and used to locate each pancake's position on the conveyor. The robots then track the pancake position and accurately pick it and place it onto the central conveyor. RG Luma configured the vision software to recognise overlapping product and, for the first time ever, FlexPickers are able to pick a product overlapped on top of another one.

The final step of the production line requires the products to be checked again by manual operators before entering Honeytop's automated packing and labelling machine, provided by Fuji Machinery Ltd.

Speaking about the final solution, William Eid, comments, “This is our first investment in robotic automated technology and despite some apprehension, we have not experienced one issue since the installation over six months ago. Turnaround time has been dramatically reduced between products and as a result we can meet our customer’s tight deadlines without delay. The robots have already enabled us to absorb a number of overheads, thanks to low labour costs and improved productivity.”

Andrew Jones, Sales Director, RG Luma, adds, “The Directors at Honeytop did express some apprehension about introducing robotics. Having integrated over 25 ABB robots in the past 12 months, we were confident in continuing to use such proven products and I think both William and his team could see how radical improvements would be possible with this change.”

Each of Honeytop’s final production lines feature four IRB360 robots, ABB’s PickMaster 3.2 software and four IRC5 controllers. The built-in versatility of the production line has dramatically cut the changeover time between products, making it easier for Honeytop to meet its deadlines with high quality, products everytime.

Honeytop Speciality Foods Ltd is the UK’s leading privately owned Naan bread producer and Europe’s leading volume manufacturer of speciality flatbreads. The company, which produces naan breads, filled breads, flat breads, dough balls, pancakes and crumpets, was established in 1984 with the sole purpose of satisfying significant demand for high quality ethnic breads. For more information please visit www.honeytop.co.uk/.

RG Luma are a leading supplier of bespoke automation solutions into the food (and other) industries specialising in picking, packing and palletising applications. For more information email sales@rglumagroup.co.uk or call 01905 753700.

For more information on ABB’s IRB 360 FlexPicker or its supporting software, please email robotics@gb.abb.com, or call 01908 350 300 Ref. ‘Honeytop’.

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Note to Editors: ABB (www.abb.com) is a leading supplier of industrial robots – also providing robot software, peripheral equipment, modular manufacturing cells and service for tasks such as welding, handling, assembly, painting and finishing, picking, packing, palletizing and machine tending. Key

markets include automotive, plastics, metal fabrication, foundry, electronics, machine tools, pharmaceutical and food and beverage industries. A strong solutions focus helps manufacturers improve productivity, product quality and worker safety. ABB has installed more than 160,000 robots worldwide.

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