

Hand in hand with the retail

BASED ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF ITS BUSINESS, THE NORT BAKERY IN SZYMANKOWO, POLAND, SHOWS THAT THE GROWTH OF THE FOOD RETAIL AND ITS OWN GROWTH ARE NOT NECESSARILY ALWAYS MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE



++ figure 1
Nort's main turnover is made with the "chleb oliwski" (Oliwa bread)

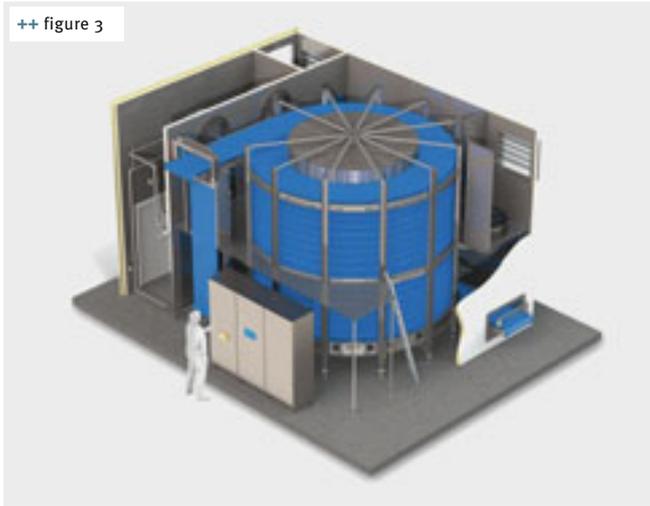
+ That a small bakery business and its high-quality products are so well received on the market and that it can expand and thus take the step to automation – happily this success story is still a common occurrence. However, achieving a story of this kind solely in the hands of supermarkets and not through its own branches is rather a different



++ figure 2
Approx. 2,000 bread loaves pass through Heinen's spiral cooler every hour

matter. And although some might describe this strategy as risky, it has been a success in the case of NORT in the Polish town of Szymankowo, 60 km from Danzig.

The Metryka family business has a long tradition in flour milling, starting as long as 100 years ago with a mill belonging to great grandfather Grzegorz Metryka and continuing through the succeeding generations. As a result of World War II the family resettled in Poland close to the Baltic Sea, where the first bakery was then founded in Tczew in 1991. Today, the company group still owns a mill and a transport business. After two years the original area was already too small for the baking operation, and the "Przedsiębiorstwo Produkcyjno Usługowe (PPU) NORT Sp. z o.o." production company relocated to the neighboring town of Szymankowo. From the very beginning, Nort supplied the surrounding retail businesses and because the demand was so good, the company was able to expand in 2006 from the original 800 m² production area to 2,100 m². By this time the proprietors Grzegorz and Karol Metryka had already wisely secured the surrounding areas of agricultural land for further expansions. A major capital investment was therefore undertaken in 2010–2011: Nort bought an entire fully automatic line to comprehensively enlarge and expand the production operation at a cost of more than PLN 9m (approx. EUR 2.2m): two silos, mixers, dough dividers, dough rounder for breads and a



++ figure 3
The spiral cooler acticool from Heinen

++ figure 4
Vice President of the Board Grzegorz Metryka with the his main product chleb oliwski

pre-proofing cabinet from WP Haton, a baking oven, proofing plant, a spiral cooling tower from Heinen, and the slicing and packing machine from Hartmann. The investment was possible because customer numbers were also increasing. Grzegorz Metryka explains that, "Our sales and thus our turnover go hand in hand with the new establishments, for example, the sites being opened by Lidl in the area around here. This means our sales have increased steadily by 10–15% for a couple of years." Another contributory factor was the fact that an EU project co-financed 60% of the procurements.

Today the baker produces more than 30 different kinds of bread and bread rolls, all under its own name, for Lidl, Netto, real and other major food retail customers within a radius of 150 km. Metryka says, "We don't supply smaller shops because we have learned from experience that these businesses are unreliable customers." Nort's main turnover is made with Kaiser rolls and the typical "chleb oliwski" (named by Oliwa, a district in Gdansk), a hearth-baked wheat mixed bread typical of the Danzig region. The 23 employees in the production department manufacture 10,000 kg of this type of ▶

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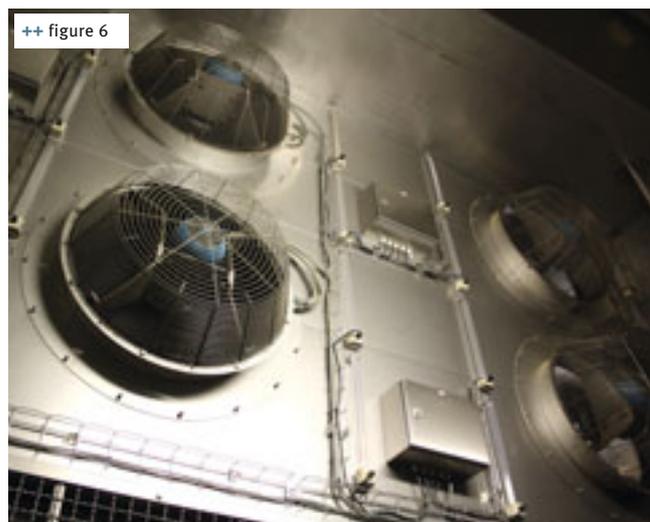




++ figure 5
Nort produces rolls with a WP plant

bread every day. Overall the first shift runs with bread loaves and the second with bread rolls. Production currently operates for 12 hours a day, corresponding to a 30 % increase in production capacity since the expansion. The breads are mainly sliced wheat loaves weighing 500 g, because this sells best in Poland, with a proportion of 70:30. Metryka's description of the market is that although wholegrain breads are becoming increasingly common in Poland, whiter loaves are still more popular. However, if it has to be darker breads, it can also easily be something special such as spelt loaves. Nort's breads now have a shelf life of approx. 6 days – an enormous improvement compared to the shelf life of 1–2 days before automation. The reason for this is firstly automation, because this reduces the inappropriate manual handling in the processing operation. However, the newer technologies used on the line also make their contribution. For example, continuous spiral cooling tower acticool. from the Heinen Freezing GmbH & Co. KG in Varel, Germany, is fitted with a germicidal UV light to ensure that fewer microorganisms are present in the air and thus also in the products.

By using the up-to-date technology of Heinen's active cooler, Nort wants to give an example of the high standard that it achieves within its own four walls – and which has enabled it to convince the chain stores. According to Metryka, the Chief Executive was looking for a manufacturer whose quality he could be absolutely convinced of – because a plant of this kind must also withstand production 24/7. By using the cooler he also solved the problem of what to do with the rather large number of fresh loaves that have accumulated since automation and enlargement of the production operation. The CEO says, "The cooler made a big contribution to a longer minimum shelf life date for the products; it also introduced uniformity, even in summer, which benefits our quality." The bread cooler was developed by Heinen with an infeed and outfeed belt before and after it. About 2,000 loaves per hour currently pass through the spiral cooler. Bread enters the acticool from the continuous oven in two rows at a temperature of 95 °C via the infeed belt. Cool, disinfected air at 17 °C passes horizontally over the loaves for approx. 100 min



++ figure 6
Four circulation fans are located together with UV lights in the air-conditioning room

on the spiral belt running around the plant's rotating drum, as a result of which they finally reach a bread temperature of below 30 °C. The belt is guided over a shaft loaded with a weight to compensate for changes in length. The air cooler is positioned at the side between the air-conditioning and the product rooms and is assisted by four fans to ensure constant circulation. Heinen states that the bread is cooled consistently to about 30 °C irrespective of the time of year. This is helped by an additional fan to exchange with outdoor air, in addition to the four circulating fans in the tower. As soon as the outdoor temperature is colder than 17 °C, this allows outdoor air to be drawn in, purified and used for cooling. This permits a noticeable saving of the ethyleneglycol coolant. If the outdoor temperature is above 17 °C, only the unit is used. Finally the loaves slide via a gravity slide onto a conveyor belt and are then sliced, packed and taken into storage. From here they are collected daily by a fleet of HGVs. Metryka smiles when asked about having his own branches: "Of course we are considering whether we want to have our own locations. But that means high investment costs, and as a small shop in Poland one must take great care not to fail. We would only be able to open our own branches if we offered everything from hot takeaway snacks to coffee and confectioneries." He says the problem in Poland, as in many countries, is not competition by other bakeries but by big supermarket chains such as Tesco, Auchan etc. "In that respect we are really better off positioning ourselves to be so forward looking and high quality that the food retail cannot resist our baked goods!" And since up to now only approx. 40 % of the capacity of the machines is being utilized, the thinking is more towards greater collaboration with the food retail.

However, Nort also has other plans for 2014: the company wants to open a frozen products line for puff pastry. The company has already bought the land for this, so the next step would be to invest in the building. Metryka's plan for the near future is that, "It is then easy for the food retail to bake off the products for 10–15 minutes in-store. Maybe then there will also be an export opportunity." +++

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