

Flexibility as a strategy

HERNE IS SITUATED IN THE MIDDLE OF THE RUHR DISTRICT, GERMANY'S BIGGEST CONTINUOUS INDUSTRIAL CONURBATION WITH A TENSE ECONOMIC SITUATION. COMPETITION IS TOUGH IN THE BAKING TRADE AS WELL. MAXIMUM FLEXIBILITY IS THE NAME OF BRINKER'S STRATEGY



++ figure 1



++ figure 2

++ figures 1+2

Brinker wants to distinguish by individual design, using his "B" to recognition value; here one of his shops at the Robert-Brauner-Platz in Herne

+ The Bäckerei Brinker GmbH from Herne, Germany, operates 67 branches from Moers to Dortmund/Unna; 48 of them are in the food retail checkout zones, some at big discounters. Depending on the store chain, its branches serve between 28 and 60 % of the market's customers, with per customer sales of between EUR 0.84 and 1.70. It's a business that needs to be reconquered every day, with many small details such as a good cup of cocoa that was promoted to B goods within a few weeks, an exquisite freshly brewed loose tea that brought the branches rising sales, and above all with the main concentration on customer loyalty. Executive Director Karl Brinker says: "After the last price increase our customer frequency dipped by only 1 %, and even that was only temporary." He has invested a lot of effort into quality. For the range of breads, which now accounts for 25 % of sales, he has again relied on their own sourdough cultures, which give the flavor to the doughs in a ripening room specifically equipped for the purpose. A bread guide, which shows every production employee clearly what a bread must look like, helps maintain process discipline and also gives consumers guidance about the product range.



++ figure 3

Brinker's mixing station uses CO₂ to cool the dough

The consistent standardization of shop design, labelling of goods and the massive presence of the "Brinker" brand both in the fresh goods branches and in the bakery-café, of which there are 20, assists recognition and orientation. The daily struggle with the details is what adds up to making the branch business successful. Seven field sales staff take care of it every day in the branches.

A dozen other employees deal with the other areas of the business. Karl Brinker, whose grandfather started as a bread manufacturer in Wanne-Eickel in 1919, expanded the business in the mid nineteen nineties by adding the "Brinker Frosty" business area, which increases the utilization of the machines and plants by adding a second and third shift. The goods go to wholesalers who supply the catering trade, to filling stations, kiosks, caterers and canteens as well as to baking stations and into the freezer cabinets of the food retail. His breads and bread rolls are even included in the product range of the Metro in Bulgaria and Stockmann in Moscow. However, in this business area it's a question of concepts, not just goods. Of course anyone can order no-name products from Brinker, but can also obtain branded goods, e.g. the "Brinkchen" premium bread rolls with a "B" on the crust that have been awarded prizes several times by the DLG (German Agricultural Society), and can implement a Brinker concept. For example, the "baking island", a low-price self-service concept, "Big B", a concept for baguettes and bread roll sandwiches, or "Na(h) gut!" baking stations for neighborhood suppliers in the food retail. Brinker supplies these not only with goods but also with shelves, a baking plan, training checklists and any amount of support.

However, baking and selling bread and bread rolls is not the only thing that Brinker can do with the help of the 200 staff in the production department; he also develops their own machines. For example, in the 3,500 m² production hall there is a peel board stacker to load boards with dough pieces for



++ figure 4



++ figure 5

++ figures 4+5

The track system (on the right in figure 4) carries the peel board onto the rotatable transfer station and onwards from there to below the bread roll conveyor belt. The peel "catapults" the board onto the track system (figure 5)

bread rolls, which was built for him to his own specifications five years ago by the special machine constructor mk Maschinenbau Kitz in Troisdorf, Germany. "The fact that the peel board manipulators at that time had no flexibility and thus could not put my ideas into practice angered me for so long that I wrote it all down and went to mk with a drawing in my hand." The Brinker peel board stacker can accept boards as well as baking trays, has a lengthways and transverse placement area, and according to Brinker it is self-learning. That means it can distinguish between the eighteens, twenty-fours and thirties baking rack wagons currently in use by Brinker. To do this an empty wagon chassis must be pushed in first of all, so optical sensors can accurately measure the spacings between the levels. A precondition is that the dimensions of the board/tray must be input beforehand and also whether it is to be deposited lengthways or crossways. The plant can hold a total of five rack wagons (in the 18s, 24s or 30s baking rack models); these are moved by hand into the area, which is fitted with grilles for safety reasons. The peel is arranged centrally and pushes the plastic board quickly and cleanly over onto a rotating transfer station. After being turned through 90°, the board reaches a depositor over which runs the conveyor belt with the pre-shaped dough pieces. The bread rolls are deposited onto the tray located underneath, and this is loaded into the board wagon, which is taken by hand to the ten rack ovens that are also used for fine baked goods. Up to 15,000 dough pieces/500 peel boards per hour can pass through the plant. Brinker is so convinced by his patented board manipulator that he plans to market it in conjunction with mk Maschinenbau Kitz. Brinker says, "In my opinion it is better than everything currently on the market."

The Executive Director's experiences with mk in 2001 had already been positive. At that time the company built a patented continuous proofing cabinet for bread roll production with a

non-driven shelf system to fit the limited available space. It operates with a proofing time of 2–3 hours with any product. Brinker's production unit also contains five Thermo-Rolls for pan bread and two Daub continuous ovens in which, for example, the farmhouse bread is baked at night and approx. 60,000 bread rolls per hour by day (25,000 in the Hanseat II and 35,000 in the Hanseat I) for the frozen products area. Brinker's latest investment was a continuous proofing cabinet with 23 levels that accommodate 2,000 x 1,200 mm boards. It will probably not be the last investment to which he contributes one of his own concepts. +++

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Facts

Turnover: EUR 45m Total workforce: 600

Number of workers in the production area: 200

67 Branches + Frozen products business +++