

# Hand-made biscuits

BISCUIT PRODUCTION AS AN ART HAS BEEN MADE POSSIBLE IN A SMALL FACTORY IN NORTHERN GERMANY, DR. SCHOLZE CONFISERIE



++ figure 1



++ Dr. Alwin Scholze III

++ Dr. Scholze Confiserie is the name of a small company located in Lueneburg, near Hamburg in northern Germany. Here, about 600 tons of biscuits of hand-made quality are produced each year by a staff of 80–100 depending on the season. The 3,000 m<sup>2</sup> production area is divided into several parts: raw material storage, dough preparation, biscuit shaping and forming, baking, coating and filling as well as packaging. There are hardly any machines. The raw material is weighed manually, two Diosna mixers make the dough, and one Polin cutting machine forms a dough band and cuts squares or circles. The rack oven is about 20 years old but is still in full working order. There is also a coating machine including cooling tunnel but this is operated only when needed. All other work is done manually. Workers standing on long stainless steel tables place dough pieces on baking sheets, deposit cocoa mass on baked biscuits, or “glue” two pieces together with fruit filling.

Since the product range is highly diversified and the output comparatively low, the manual work obviously pays off and is also emphasized in the marketing as a distinct advantage.

## Human “conveying belt”

The manual packaging process for the 1 kg conference box is very impressive. There is a long table in the packaging section with 16 different bowls holding the individual types of biscuits. 12–15 women move around the table and start by placing paper cups on a tray, then filling the cups with different biscuits, and finally stacking two trays in one box, weighing the box, closing it and placing it on a trolley. Then they start all over again. According to pastry chef Joachim Werner this has the benefit of reducing human errors and increasing speed. He reports that they had tried another arrangement where each woman was doing only one task all the time, for example placing paper cups on the tray or filling only one type of biscuit in the cup or weighing the box, but experience showed that the women had less concentration and made more errors than with the above arrangement where they move from station to station.

## Large variety

The product range of Dr. Scholze Confiserie comprises many different biscuits from ▶



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++ figure 1  
Polin dough cutter

chocolate-covered, fruit filled crescents to chocolate-chip squares, spritz rosettes combined in pairs with cocoa mass, hearts with a fruity center, star-shaped biscuits and many more. Special product ideas from customers are realized upon request.

The production is highly flexible and can easily adapt to special orders. Dr. Alwin Scholze III, food chemist and CEO, is proud of his niche products. “We produce biscuits for two business fields. The most popular product is our 1 kg conference box filled with various biscuits intended for industrial customers who serve our products during meetings, in hotels, restaurants, or catering services.” Conferenzia is the name of this sweet box which is filled with up to 16 different types of biscuits. It also comes as a summer edition without chocolate or for the winter season with special Christmas cookies.

The other field is private label brands. The company produces biscuits under its own labels as well as for example for Arko (confectionery chain) and Edeka (food retail chain). These packs are much smaller, mostly comprising six or eight biscuits. They sell for 2.80 – 3.00 Euros for 100 g which seems rather expensive, but considering the amount of manual labor, it is still fairly reasonable. “Our products are supposed to be eaten as a precious little treat, not a meal,” say Dr. Scholze.

Dr. Scholze Confiserie also produces biscuits for diabetics. They have a 20% market share in this field. A new range of



++ figure 2  
Manual finishing of chocolate sandwich biscuits

organic biscuits was launched at ISM in Cologne at the beginning of this year with most of the raw materials purchased from local producers. The trend towards ecologically produced foods will continue, presumes Dr. Scholze adding “However, the consumer will still ask for pleasure combined with sensory quality. So-called “light” products do not play a role in my business. People are seeking indulgence and they will find it in our biscuits. The trend “be nifty, get thrifty” is fading out, luckily.”

Dr. Scholze Confiserie is a family-owned enterprise now headed by the grandson of the founder. Company figures, except the number of employees and production quantity are not disclosed. According to Dr. Alwin Scholze III “talking about sales figures reflects one’s vanity, all that counts is the rate of return.” He did not want to disclose either one. In general, he has observed that the total sales in the confectionery segment in Germany stagnated in 2006, but contrary to this trend his company showed growth. He is pleased with the quantitative level his company has achieved so far and sees some possibilities for further improvement on the qualitative side. His company will continue its pursuit to cater for trends such as fruity, vital, chocolate and marzipan on the confectionery market. The export share is currently about 10%. Dr. Scholze biscuits are sold in the UK, USA, Canada, Italy and Belgium. Further expansion is expected. +++



++ figure 3  
No two hand-made biscuits look alike



++ figure 4  
Eight biscuits in one pack



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