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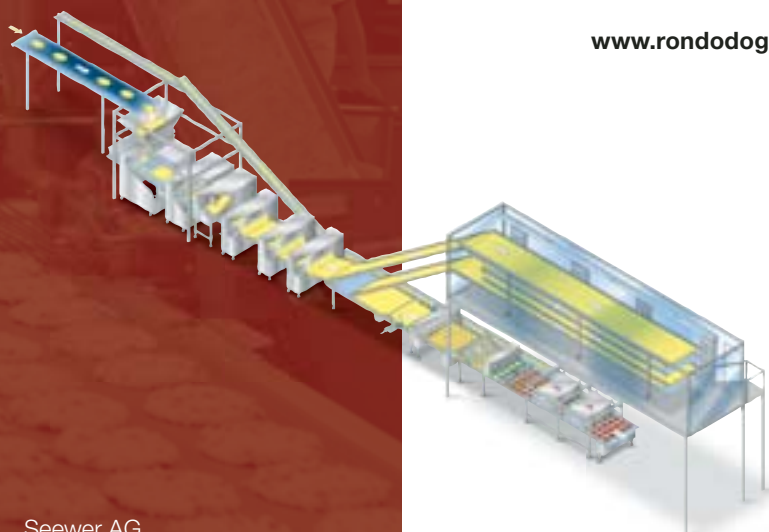


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Vulnerable companies

In Germany, recently, there was huge media coverage concerning a journalist who reported about his experiences working undercover for four weeks in an industrial bakery. He took pictures of the hygiene conditions in the plant, investigated the working conditions and compiled statements from his colleagues. "Luckily" for the bakery, the media connected the name of the bakery with the discount store Lidl which had also been recently in the media spotlight due to its spying on its workers.



++ Hildegard Keil, editor-in-chief
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The problem is not new and not limited to Germany. Cost pressure and a lack of skilled management are the main reasons in some production facilities as to why working conditions and safety regulations are not always as they should be. IFS, BRC and other certificates are no protection.

In Germany, the bakery got off lightly. The bakery association, labor union, and official authorities etc. have all cooperated and within one week of the report the conditions in the company were remedied.

This example shows that, first of all, conditions are not irreversible but can be changed. Secondly, there is always the risk that the working conditions can be brought into the open, and there is also the risk that the reputation of the company and the entire industry is damaged in such a way that it cannot be easily healed. When it comes to bakeries and their behavior, the discussion on wheat prices has made the consumers more aware and more critical. This is reflected in purchasing behavior. Prior to each purchase, consumers weigh price and performance. It is only the competition leaders who can ask for higher prices. Whoever is unable to offer this USP, will lose its customers to cheaper outlets.

Amongst the factors taken into consideration are the qualities of the individual products, the variety of the product range and service as well as the reliability of the quality and with this the desire to be on the safe side when eating a bakery item. If a company does not recognize these requirements, customers will turn to other suppliers. Variations in the range of products must not be confused with a wealth of products. Precise calculations and the constant reviewing of margins for each individual product are imperative. The entire range of products from patisserie to bread must be included. The individual segment needs not be huge but of good quality and variation. Genuine product developments are called for as eating today is more than just the intake of food. It also comprises health aspects, care for family members, status symbols and last but not least entertainment.

Therefore, bad news concerning a company does not result in just a short decline in sales. A lot of emotion comes into play and the damage can be enormous and long-lasting. This alone is a good reason to treat the workers well. By the way, happy employees are much more productive than unhappy ones! But this is another topic.

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