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THE PERFECT CUT

Poultry processor breaks out of the box with packaging line automation and one-piece corrugated cartons

BY ANDREW JOSEPH, FEATURES EDITOR
PHOTOGRAPHY BY COLE GARSIDE

Claiming perfection is not a mere idle boast for folks at **Perfect Poultry Inc.**, but rather a daily pursuit of operational and packaging excellence that has enabled the Toronto-based chicken processor to spread its wings at a very impressive pace despite some early turbulence and setbacks.

And if breaking into the highly-competitive business right at the peak of the Avian Flu epidemic back in 2004 may have seemed like a slight case of irrational exuberance at the time of a nationwide shortage of edible birds, it seems more like a stroke of genius today in light of the upstart's steady rise through the industry ranks, especially in the challenging economic climate of the last few years.

"Hey, everybody's gotta eat, even during these tough economic times," says company co-owner and president Danny Rother, who founded the further processing operation jointly with his old pal Ian Segal, who oversees sales and purchasing.

"Once the Avian Flu crisis was over and we were able to ensure a steady supply of poultry, our business has grown steadily every year since," Segal told *Canadian Packaging* on a recent visit to the

company's 23,000-square-foot production facility in the city's north end.

Employing 65 people to process and package fresh chicken drums, thighs, wings and breasts for major grocery chains across Canada, the company is perfectly content to focus on the further processing segment of the business, according to Rother, rather than developing its own consumer brands.

Right Choice

"We don't have our own brands, and it was a conscious decision," explains Rother. "We knew from the start that the poultry market is a very tough one, with many popular, respected and big-name companies involved, so we thought it might be a better business if we became a further processor, who also did the packaging on-site.

"What we do is ensure that we cut up the chickens into whatever cuts the customer's order calls for," he adds, "while ensuring we only supply the best chicken out there, which has been processed in a perfectly safe and clean environment."

To back up that premise, the Perfect Poultry plant became a *HACCP* (*Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points*)-certified facility almost right from the outset, according to Segal.

"Being HACCP-certified lets our customers

Holding this year's PAC Sustainability Competition Award trophy in his hands, Perfect Poultry co-owner Ian Segal is flanked (from left) by Roger Keeley, director of marketing for Atlantic Packaging Products; Perfect Poultry co-owner Danny Rother; and Atlantic Packaging sales representative Ken Fleming.

know that along with providing a high-quality product, we are also very serious about providing a safe product for the consumer," says Segal, pointing out that cutting corners or doing just a bare minimum to get by is just not part of the company's hardworking culture and philosophy.

"While it is true that we are always looking to streamline our production line in order to save time and money, we have absolutely no interest in cutting corners in any which way," asserts Segal. "What makes this company a successful one is our competitive nature, our ongoing quest for efficiency, and our ability to always look after our customers' needs by going that extra mile for them.

"We often have short turn-around times on orders, where a customer will call us up and tell us they need a certain product now," he says, "and we always manage to get it done for when they need it."

Although Perfect Poultry operates on an eight-hours-a-day, five-days-a-week basis, overtime and extra shift are not a rare occurrence at the Perfect Poultry plant, according to Segal.

"We work until the job is done," he proclaims.

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The recently-installed POPLOK tray-erector from Eagle Packaging Group enables the plant's secondary packaging operations to handle an average of 10 cartons per minute using the new one-piece, die-cut corrugated cartons (inset) supplied by Atlantic Packaging Products.



A close-up view of pneumatic components incorporated inside the POPLOCK tray erector to enable quick and gentle handling of the cartons' flaps.



A Perfect Poultry plant employee monitors a Bizerba weigher installed on the facility's production line.



Every product packaged at the plant is conveyed past a S+S metal detection system to ensure product integrity.



An Alpha 86 HS labeler from Weber ensures quick and precise label placement onto the passing packages.

THE PERFECT CUT

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"We don't stop until the orders are filled.

"I think it's our work ethic and attention to detail that has helped spur Perfect Poultry to its current level of success," he reasons, "and since our worth ethic isn't going to change, we expect we will continue to remain a successful and growing company."

That also means making continuous process improvements in all of the plant's operations, says Segal, citing a recent project focused on automating the plant's secondary packaging operation—namely the placing of trays filled with fresh chicken cuts into the corrugated shipping cartons.

"Up until recently, we had five employees hand-

building cartons for us," Rother recalls.

"It was a very time-consuming chore, and while it was working, it was not going to allow us to progress to the next level of production efficiency."

To automate the process, Perfect Poultry sought advice from the Toronto-based corrugated packaging products manufacturer **Atlantic Packaging Products Ltd.**, a long-established supplier of corrugated secondary packaging solutions for the food-and-beverage industries operating 20 manufacturing, warehousing and distribution facilities across Canada.

"We were very excited about working with Perfect Poultry to improve their packaging operations," says Atlantic Packaging's corporate director of marketing Roger Keeley.

Piece of Mind

"Before we became involved, Perfect Poultry had a two-piece carton and an assembly line, with a lot of people manning it, that just wasn't as efficient as it could be.

"So we had our sales consultant Ken Fleming come in and take a look at the cartons they were using," Keeley recounts, "and he discovered that if Perfect Poultry decided to utilize a one-piece, die-cut carton, then Atlantic Packaging could help them save on materials *and* improve their throughput."



Trays of product move past a Markem-Imaje inkjet coder to have lot data and product codes applied.



A recently-purchased ULMA Galaxy high-speed wrapping machine awaits its turn on the second production line currently being installed at the Perfect Poultry plant.



An Emplex bag sealer is to seal up pouches of various-sized chicken cuts.

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Designed by Atlantic Packaging, the new one-piece boxes were not only engineered to help the plant save time and money, according to Keeley, but also to maintain optimal product protection and presentation.

As evidenced by the Silver Award won at this year's PAC Sustainability Competition Awards of PAC—The Packaging Association this past spring, the new one-piece boxes more than merely fulfilled the plant's expectations.

"This design enabled Perfect Poultry to go from a traditional two-piece poultry box to a one-piece carton with great success," says Fleming. "Instead of hand-erecting thousands of units per day with four to five people, this customer went to a two-man crew operating a carton erector."

Made from 100-percent recycled fibers and utilizing C-Flute liner for better stacking capabilities, the new one-piece, die-cut boxes combine impressive features such as hinged lids, vent holes and easy-lock closures to provide an optimal secondary packaging solution for Perfect Poultry's requirements, according to Fleming.

Moreover, the one-piece boxes proved to be a perfect match for the new high-speed POPLOK case-erector—manufactured by the Miami, Fla.-based Eagle Packaging Group LLC and supplied via the Burlington, Ont.-based systems integrator Kraken Automation—which was installed at the plant in February of 2011.

Designed to run virtually any type of self-locking tray with or without a lid, from two-sided tucks to five-sided tucks, the new case-erector provided "a no-problem, hassle-free operation right from box one," according to Rother.

Controlled with an Omron PLC (programmable logic controller) and equipped with a color touchscreen HMI (human-machine interface) for user-friendly operation, the POPLOK machine employs standard Venturi vacuum technology for quick and gentle handling of the cartons' flaps, with its interlocked safety doors helping ensure

a completely safe working environment for the machine operators.

Other equipment utilized at Perfect Poultry includes: a Bizerba weigher; a DLS tunnel metal detection unit from S+S Inspection Inc. (powered by a Boston Gear motor manufactured by Altra Industrial Motion, Inc.); an Alpha 86 WS model labeler from Weber Packaging Solutions, Inc.; two high-speed Galaxy tray-wrappers from ULMA Packaging; a Corr-Vac vacuum sealer manufactured by M-Tek, Inc.; and an S8 C2 model small-character inkjet coder from Markem-Imaje.

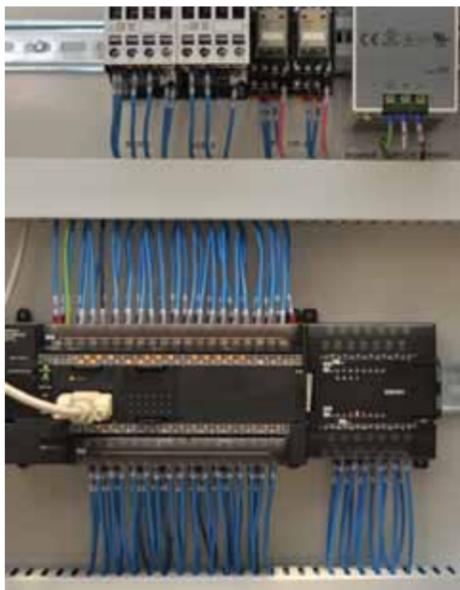
"Becoming better automated has been very helpful for us," says Rother, adding the company is currently in the process of installing a second production line at the facility to respond to growing production volumes.

"Not only has it allowed us to work with a better

corrugated package and a tray-erector that saves us time and makes us more efficient," he sums up, "but we also feel confident that we will be able to service our customers more efficiently.

"It all seems perfect to me."

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Close-up view of the Omron MY 4 general-purpose relays inside the POPLOK case-erector.



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