

Integrating Packaging Machinery

Let's face it ... every manufacturer has to package its products. But what is the best way to keep packaging machinery updated and operating efficiently without replacing it and sinking countless dollars into the effort?

A recent trend in the packaging machinery industry has been to integrate bottling lines, utilizing new machinery where necessary while rebuilding and upgrading existing or previously owned machinery. This type of arrangement offers the manufacturer significant cost savings. Incorporating pre-owned machinery, even if completely rebuilt, is a fraction of the cost of a new machine. Rebuilt machinery often comes with warranties that include parts and service. By performing a simple cost comparison of replacing a machine completely, vs. rebuilding and upgrading, a clear basis for investment decision-making will become evident.

Another advantage is flexibility. Why replace a complete bottling line if it is not really necessary? If each component piece of machinery in that line is evaluated, some machines will perform to growing production demands by upgrading controls and/or completely rebuilding the piece. Thus, the existing line remains functional and grows with production needs. There may also be surplus equipment that could be upgraded and integrated with other machinery to form a bottling line that operates like new. Some examples that illustrate the effective combination of bottle packaging machinery follow.

Companies have incorporated used and new equipment in a bottling line in these scenarios:

Application: Packaging a powdered health supplement

- Requirements: Manufacturer needed the line to accommodate a wide variety of container sizes (from 8-oz. containers to one-gallon tubs) and utilize engineering and integration services.
- Machinery Solution: New unscrambling table was added; powder filler and capper were rebuilt; a new labeler and new conveyors were added.

Application: Tablet packaging line for a generic analgesic product

- Requirements: Combination of new and pre-owned technology and systems upgrades for clean design systems.
- Machinery Solution: Rebuilt bottle unscrambler, rebuilt tablet counter/filler, rebuilt capper; added a new labeler and new conveyors.

The trend of combining new and pre-owned or rebuilt machinery into bottling lines is not limited to smaller companies that cannot afford to purchase new machinery. *Fortune 100* companies in nutritional, personal care, household product and pharmaceutical industries have all adopted this method of line integration. They may not need to save money, but time is often of the essence. When a product has to go to market immediately, a good deal of time can be saved on delivery and customization if the additional machinery is pre-owned or rebuilt.

Many manufacturers are building lines consisting exclusively of pre-owned and rebuilt machinery. This arrangement works nicely if an equipment supplier stocks the pieces needed for the project or is able to source them. Pre-owned equipment can be a golden opportunity to fulfill a vital need faster, cheaper and even more effectively than with new machinery.

There are some lessons here for the packaging equipment buyer: Used equipment has usually proven it either works or fits a need. It doesn't need to be "broken in." Very often, because it has run under "real world" conditions, it will perform "like new" with just a few upgrades. What is described as "used" is--in many cases--new, for all intents and purposes. Most likely it has never been run or has very low mileage. Perhaps a project or product was canceled before full-scale production got started. Either way, the trick here is to either know the equipment or know a reliable source, or both. Quality is not the sole province of new equipment.

Finding a machinery supplier that can provide a mix of new, pre-owned, rebuilt and upgraded equipment with complete integration abilities may not be easy. However, the search will be worth it if the goal is to maximize efficiency while minimizing capital expenditure. The key is for the supplier to have the ability to provide new technology for the more critical pieces in a packaging line. Labeling is a prime example of an operation for which the added flexibility and accuracy of new label application equipment may be necessary. When the right mix of capabilities is found, it will provide the best value and long-term solution to production needs.

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