

# Customized depositor leads to labor savings at Cheryl & Co.

**T**he nature of Cheryl & Co.'s business requires them to be flexible. The Westerville, Ohio-based baker manufactures more than 200 skus, which it sells through various outlets, including catalogs, corporate sales, fundraisers, Internet, foodservice and its own retail stores.

Despite its need to be flexible, Jim Krueger, Cheryl & Co.'s president of manufacturing, says the company is always looking for ways to automate its manufacturing process.

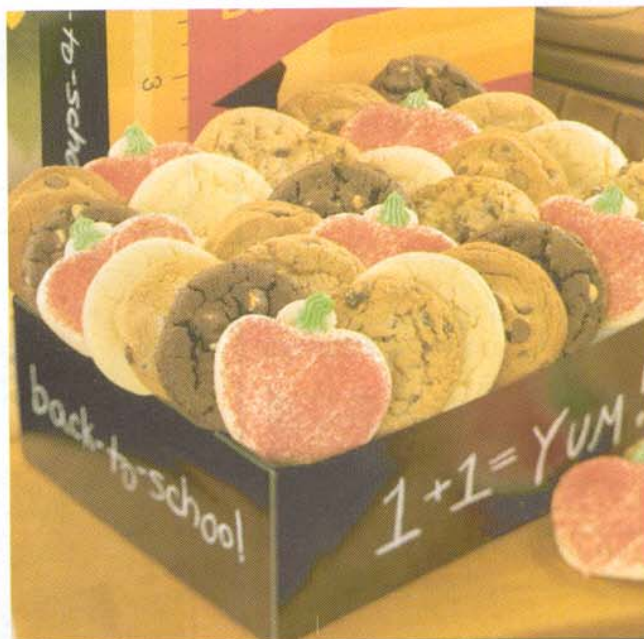
For Cheryl & Co., one of its most labor-intensive tasks was depositing icing on its cookies, which happen to be one of the company's biggest sellers.

"We were hand-icing the cutout cookies because we did various shapes throughout the year: hearts for Valentine's day, eggs for Easter and Christmas trees for Christmas," Krueger says. "We were icing about four to five million of these cookies a year by hand."

For a company that produces 10 million lbs. of dough a year, the hefty amount of handwork became a problem.

"It was quite a tedious process," Krueger says. "We were not doing a very good job with portion control." As many as 20 employees handled various responsibilities on the cookie line, including hand icing the cookies. With a multitude of employees icing cookies, the product became inconsistent.

Always seeking automation, Cheryl & Co. enlisted the services of Hinds-Bock Corp., Redmond, Wash., to design and build a custom-made depositor that could handle the



variety of cookies that Cheryl & Co. produced.

"We have been doing business with Hinds-Bock for several years and we actually have several other pieces of their equipment," Krueger says. "They know our product and they know our plant."

To automate the icing of cookies, Hinds-Bock developed a four-piston, diving depositor to portion a variety of icings on top of the different shapes of cookies. The unit deposits the icing, four cookies across, in six rows on an 18-in. by 26-in. sheet pan. Cheryl & Co. also installed a conveyor system to automatically move pans under the depositor.

"The depositor has a cam on it so it actually moves up and down," Krueger says. "The depositor gets pretty close to the cookies so when it deposits the icing, it also spreads it out."

With the custom-made depositor in tow, Cheryl & Co. expects to manufacture 20% more of its cookies than it did last year. And, according to Krueger, that is not the most significant thing about the depositor.

"The key thing is that we had 15 to 20 people a day doing this job for eight hours," Krueger says. "I now have seven to eight employees doing the job. The depositor led to huge labor savings."

