
A big fish story

SCA Pakkesystemer, Denmark



When robots take over fish packing, employees win with a better working environment, free from heavy and lifting that could cause injury.

Modern fish factory

If you think that a visit to a fish packing plant means dealing with a lot of slippery rubbish and an unpleasant and overpowering smell, you'd be wrong. At least if you were visiting the fish packing plant at Sæby on the northern tip of Jutland in Denmark. Instead of garbage and stink, there is a large, attractive modern factory, with no special fishy smell.

Already in the reception lobby, it's easy to see that the company is run on modern lines, with a good mixture of the friendliness and business sense that people in the Vendsyssel area of Denmark are known for. The company has spent money on art, and the buildings are beautiful and pleasant to walk around. Any pre-conceived notions are quickly dispelled.

Inside the plant, some 11 ABB robots - three cells of one IRB 4400 and two IRB140 robots, plus one IRB 6650 and one IRB 640 robot supplied by SCA Pakkesystemer in collaboration with ABB, pack, stack and handle the many hundreds of thousands of boxes of mackerel, which is what Sæby Fiskindustri specializes in.

Those who like packaged mackerel might be envious to see all the different varieties that are produced and sent off to customers with different requirements in different countries. The packaging is brightly colored, the products range from the "three for ten crowns" cheap cans to very tasty and more luxurious delicacies.

SCA's unique presence at Sæby

Henrik Sørensen is the sales manager and Ulrik Bendtsen is the technical manager at SCA Pakkesystemer, which develops and sells modern automation equipment and packing systems. At first glance, it would be hard to determine that the two men are not Sæby Fiskeindustri employees, since they are on a first-name basis with many and are free to come and go in the buildings.

But it was Sørensen and Bendtsen who installed a hyper-modern, new packing unit at the factory. SCA has supplied automatic packing systems for over twenty years to Sæby Fiskeindustri, and the trusting collaboration is obvious.

SCA supplies everything from manual packing machinery to complete, fully-automated packing system installations, and has handled everything from brake discs to packets of cheese spread. SCA has had a presence at Sæby Fiskeindustri for many years.

FACTS

Sæby Fiskeindustri use three cells of one IRB 4400 and two IRB 140 robots, plus one IRB 6650 and one IRB 640, which provide:

- Flexibility to handle a wide range of packages means less downtime
- A capacity boost of 60-70 percent
- Employees avoid monotonous and heavy work

Why automation?

“The purchase of the new robots was brought about, first and foremost, by wanting to get rid of heavy, monotonous, repetitious work,” says Bendtsen, who along with Sørensen has gained exceptional expertise in developing packing systems that can manage particularly complicated tasks.

The goal here was to get the mackerel sorted from the autoclave trolley, shrink wrapped, packed in paper bags or on several different types of pallet, palletized and then foil wrapped, to suit customer requirements. But several different packing patterns are used. And there are ¼, ½ and 1/1 pallets, several different types of paper bags, and several different requirements for foil wrapping, among other needs.

“This requires a very flexible installation, and SCA succeeded in developing it, even if there were a number of difficult situations from time to time,” says Bendtsen.

“Development used to mean that we had to spend many hours in analysing the movements to be copied, and what the robots really would have to be re-programmed to do,” says Bendtsen.

“The requirement was that it should be a flexible system, and that it should be easy to serve. After this, we prepared the layout and came up with a design proposal. After many small adjustments, we were able to create the final design and design specifications. One of the most difficult things was to find space and include the new requirements that naturally occur during the development phase. But we succeeded and we have now succeeded in achieving a capacity boost of 60-70 percent for the same production time.”

Project forming a new company

SCA Pakkesystemer acquired two of its former collaboration partners during 2005, so it is a new experience for Bendtsen to work in such a large company as SCA. SCA wanted to concentrate competence and know-how so they could offer to take on larger jobs, and it appears that they will succeed with the new company, SCA Pakkesystemer.

“All in all, we have 50-60 robots out there working, and we have 25 currently on order at SCA. So we will soon pass 100 robots. And we always have to be able to offer flexible, turn-key solutions. Progress is rapid. Five years ago, an installation like this would have looked very different, with a lot more traditional mechanical components,” says Bendtsen.

“We have our own service department and have signed a partnership contract with ABB for personnel training, so that we can offer the necessary maintenance and service. This is because these high technology installations have to run at high efficiency levels and capacity all year round. For this reason, we have to be prepared to provide round the clock service for the installations,” Sørensen concludes.



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