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DE-BUG A CONVERTING LINE

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Working out the bugs

Bend, OR-based Suterra cures slitting, web-tension problems by retrofitting its converting line for insect-control products.

By Contributing Editor Barb Axelson

For Buddy Durham and John Casey, the maintenance supervisor and maintenance technician (respectively) at Bend, OR-based Suterra LLC, analyzing the company's converting process and applying the right combination of retrofitted components and equipment rebuilds have paid off handsomely in faster speeds, increased productivity and a higher-quality product. And just in time, as business is booming.

Suterra makes environmentally friendly, mating-disruption products that dispense pheromones to control, but not eliminate, insects that threaten crops—a hot item in today's “green” marketplace (See sidebar). Demand increases continually, and says Durham, “Our annual growth over the last five years has been at 30 percent. We have to expand the business and keep up with it.”

New methods needed

In the dispenser manufacturing process, multiple webs of



Maintenance technician John Casey adjusts the MAGPOW magnetic-particle brake on one of the Suterra converting lines.

material on each of six machines are layered together, sealing in pheromone-laced pads, to create the product. The completed laminate is then slit into three separate lanes, which are guillotine-cut in register into individual dispensers.

To solve years of inconsistent speed

problems and difficulties with tension control, Casey and Durham began the extensive equipment-rebuilding project a few months ago. Casey searched online to find suppliers of slit stations and chose Tidland Corp. (www.tidland.com), a Maxcess Intl. company, to collaborate on the upgrade.



Machine operator D on Robinson handles the finished pheromone dispensers as they come off the equipment.

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Slit-web widths were to go from 4.5 to 6 in. to provide higher volume; the previously used razor-blade cutting would no longer work. Instead, crush-style knifeholders from Tidland's Performance Series were selected to provide the best slit quality. Two Class 1 Performance Series knifeholders were purchased per machine, depending on the slit width required for the particular product and machine itself. Casey and his colleagues did some wide-ranging prep

“Our upgraded machines give operators more work space and produce less waste.”

work, building up systems and making new bases for the machines.

Casey notes that operators used to change dulled razor blades two or three times during a shift. Now, the crush-style knifeholders barely need maintenance, and Casey says they have “improved tremendously” the tracking of materials, noting, “It sure

does save time.”

“Because they are running their product line with an intermittent cycle of the web,” explains Craig Cooper, Maxcess Intl. district manager, “this posed problems with accurately producing a consistent slit as the product advanced through the

slitting area. John was able to develop a mounting design for the Tidland knifeholders that produced an accurate, continuous slit with our knives.”

Casey also replaced simple steel bars holding the rolls of different materials with three Tidland external-element air shafts per machine



Tidland Class 1 Performance Series knifeholders crush-cut the product laminate into three separate webs.

to make it easier for the operators to change out materials (up to three times in a 10-hr shift). Suterra employs about 50-60 workers at its 24,000-sq-ft plant.

Tension in control

To remedy the tension-control problem, MAGPOWR (www.magpowr.com) magnetic-particle brakes were

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installed to provide exacting control over web unwinding, to eliminate material “wander” of misaligned layers and wrinkles in the product, and to reduce waste. The MAGPOWR brakes are fitted to each Tidland air shaft, allowing each material to unwind at

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the proper tension, regardless of material type. Tension can also be adjusted continuously.

"Now, we get complete tensioning," says Durham. "We can now run three times the dispensers. We do runs of different sizes on each machine. Our

upgraded machines also give operators more work space and produce less waste."

Suterra's first retrofitted system went into full operation in September; the entire upgrade project is set for December completion. ■

MORE INFO:

CONVERTER:

SUTERRA LLC, 866/326-6737, www.suterra.com

SUPPLIERS:

TIDLAND CORP., 800/426-1000,

www.tidland.com

MAGPOWR, 800/624-7697, www.magpowr.com

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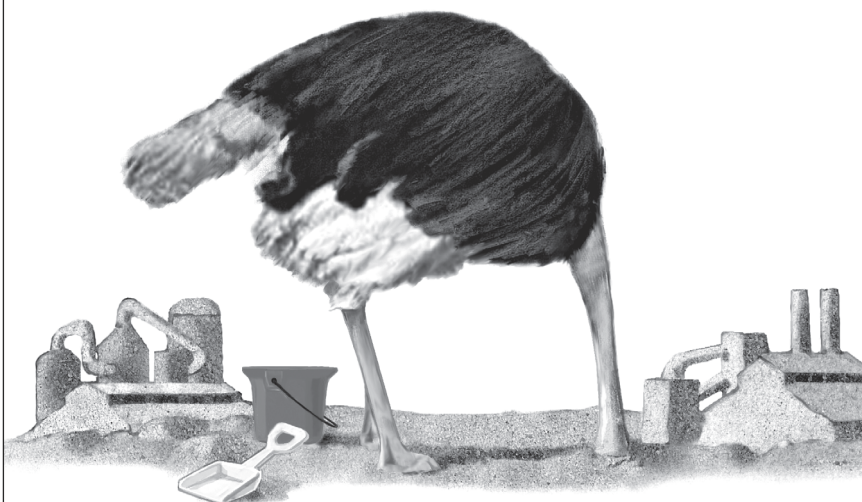
Up to 200 dispensers per acre are needed for some CheckMate® insect-control applications.

Because it uses pheromones to disrupt the mating cycle of numerous types of insects (rather than killing them with pesticides), Suterra LLC's CheckMate® dispenser (shown above) is considered environmentally friendly and highly sought after, particularly by organic farmers. Up to 15 different pheromone combinations are used, depending on the insect species being treated.

Suterra develops, manufactures and markets CheckMate, as well as the Puffer®, BioLure® and Scenturion® lines of insect-control products. Typically hung from tree or plant branches, these lures, traps and dispensers are used in fruit orchards and other crop fields, such as tomato and cotton.

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