

[easyFairs Fantasy Football](#)[UK Packaging Awards](#)[Events diary](#)**Search Jobs****Go****Job of the day**

→ [Project Engineer \(Fixed-term contract\)](#)
£43k to £54k
North West England

Jobs of the week

- [Account Manager](#)
- [Marketing Manager - Healthcare Packaging](#)
- [Packaging Production Coordinator. Own Brand Development](#)
- [Asset Change Lead \(Fixed term contract\)](#)
- [SALES SUPPORT EXECUTIVE](#)
- [Digital Press Operator](#)
- [Account Manager](#)
- [Head of Packaging Consumables](#)
- [New Business Sales Executive](#)
- [Packaging Innovation Senior Scientist \(Mars-Birstall\) to £39k](#)

Business Directory

- Product/Service
 Company

Search**Poll**

Does packaging do enough to attract new talent?

- Yes
 No

Vote**In this issue**

- [Packaging News](#)
- [PrintWeek](#)

Subscribe**PackagingNews Features list 2010**

packagingnews.co.uk

Download For Free

News[Print Article](#) [Email to a friend](#)**Project Profile: Biscuit brand tackles crunch with robot buy**Josh Brooks, [Packaging News](#), 01 July 2010**Endline automation investment helped McVitie's tap into demand for value packs****Who** United Biscuits**Aim** Automate packing of twin-pack McVitie's digestive biscuits**Spend** £165,000**What** Endline Versapak**When** May 2008

United Biscuits' Versapak move was such a success it ordered two further machines to apply the system to other brands

Challenge

Food manufacturer United Biscuits' McVitie's Digestives have been on the UK's supermarket shelves for 160 years and today the brand is the biggest-selling biscuit in the country.

Back in 2007, as the credit crunch was starting to bite, the company decided to launch a twin-pack of McVitie's Digestives. For consumers this would represent better value for money; but for United Biscuits, it posed the problem of how to pack the twin-pack into secondary or shelf-ready packaging.

Initially, the issue was solved by simply assembling the packs by hand at United Biscuits' McVitie's production plant in Harlesden, north-west London.

Mark Springer, United Biscuits site engineering manager, says: "The twin-pack was a new offering to the market and no-one really knew how it would go. But within nine months it was a real success, so we decided to automate the packing operation."

Strategy

With a shopping list of criteria for a machine, not least that it should be "sensibly-priced", Springer then went to the market to find the best piece of kit for the job in hand.

"We wanted something that was not over-complicated, but not cheap and cheerful, and a reliable piece of equipment," says Springer. "The footprint was also very important to us."

Bedfordshire-based end-of-line equipment supplier Endline had been supplying packing equipment to United Biscuits for two decades and its new Versapak machine, Springer says, "ticked all the boxes".

The Versapak, which has a footprint of 1.8m by 1.8m and height of 2.1m, had recently been created as the result of a joint project between Endline and fellow UK firm, robotics manufacturer Quin Systems, based in Wokingham.

The machine is a combination of Quin's high-speed automatic RTheta case packer and Endline's 220 series case erecting machine. It launched in 2006, and has since been demonstrated at a number of trade shows including the last Interpack in 2008 and the PPMA show last year, where new features were announced including the possibility of adding extra orientations for packing the primary packs within the secondary or retail-ready packaging.

Implementation

Once the machine had been chosen, Springer says, "the next concern was whether it did what it said on the tin". Yet installation and the switch from hand-packing to relying entirely on the Versapak, following its installation in May 2008, happened very quickly.

"To be honest, we switched to the automation and we've never looked back," he says. "The change happened within a week."

Results

Springer says that the machine "hasn't missed a beat" since it was installed. It runs at speeds of 20 cases, or 100 picks, every minute when at full tilt.

In terms of cost savings, Springer says that the main win has been the machine's payback time of around 18 months – compared to a target of around 20 months for most of the Harlesden site's investments. "We used to employ two people per shift to pack the twin-packs, so that's the saving," says Springer.

In fact, United Biscuits has been so satisfied with the results that the company has bought two more Versapak machines to roll the system out across the rest of the McVitie's range, which includes HobNobs, Rich Tea, Chocolate Digestives and more.

"The first one was a bit of a trial and we didn't know what to expect," says Springer. "But the other two will be up and running by the middle of the year." One was installed earlier this year, while the third machine will be delivered in the coming weeks.

Sign up for News Bulletins**Related Articles**

- [Endline looks to overcome market's flat sales growth](#)
- [Endline looks to grow distributor network](#)
- [Endline to deploy latest equipment at Total](#)

Other Articles

- [Eagle to launch new Boreon machine at Pack Expo](#)
- [Dorner launches A2000+ for drinks packaging lines](#)
- [Endline adds wide format entry level press to digital 2000 range](#)
- [EFI provides digital printing system for flexible packaging](#)
- [Intelliflex targets growth after 2009 spend on brand bag kit](#)
- [Kobal reduces per ton fees as volume rises](#)

Most Read Articles

- | Article | Times | Times |
|--|-------|-------|
| → Aulis drops cartons from entire foodgrade range | | |
| → UK Packaging Awards 2010 Shortlist revealed | | |
| → Competition face pressure as buyers resist price hikes | | |
| → It used to take prices up to 100% with subcontractors and flexible paper rises | | |