

The Full Cookie

The butter cookie was invented over 100 years ago by Hermann Bahlsen. Since then, the company has been one of the leading trendsetters in the industry for factory-produced sweet cakes and cookies as well as new technologies. And Bahlsen also relies on the support of Porsche Consulting.

By: Reiner Schloz, Photos by: Bahlsen | Archiv







Sweet production: Butter cookies lined up in formation

Podbielskistraße 11, Hanover, Germany, is an exclusive address. Space and time come together here to create an extremely intoxicating mixture. Despite all the cool clarity and exclusive materials that you will find at the headquarters of the cake and cookie giant Bahlsen, you will also find tradition oozing from every pore. Employees at the company's nerve center work hard to come up with innovations which are very much in the traditions of the founder of the company.

Werner M. Bahlsen, the third-generation owner of the company, therefore finds it easy to explain the most recent developments. Lean management is intended to make Bahlsen even more efficient. In order to successfully implement the production theories originating from Japan, the company is working together closely with Porsche Consulting. "Our company," says Bahlsen, "has always been one step ahead, and has always developed new technologies. We must constantly modernize our business and become faster and more agile." Bahlsen inherited this drive to push the company forward from his grandfather. Hermann Bahlsen learned everything he needed to know about the sugar trade in the five years he spent in England. In addition, he also came to appreciate the ready-to-eat cakes and cookies served with afternoon tea. When he returned to Hanover in 1887, he succeeded in creating his vision of a "permanently fresh baked pastry," a luxury treat that was unheard of in his home country at the time. Bahlsen took over the factory business "Englische Cakes und Biscuits" and then renamed it "Hannoversche Cakesfabrik H. Bahlsen." Since then, there have been no crumbs, just hard work.

Hermann Bahlsen invented the butter cookie back in 1891 and named it—following in the traditions of Mozart chocolate balls, Bismarck herring and Schiller pastries—after the universal genius Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. In 1900, the graphic artist Heinrich Mittag developed the TET symbol from the hieroglyphic "jed" (everlasting), and



Nice and tidy: Bahlsen's production operations

it is still in use today. The first dustproof and moisture-proof packaging followed in 1904. Bahlsen also waged a battle with the linguists and won: his neologism “*Keks*” (cookie) was included in the Duden dictionary of German. But even more important was the fact that in 1905, Bahlsen was the first company to introduce the conveyor belt—long before auto magnate Henry Ford did so.

Today Bahlsen is a European company with five production sites in Germany and three more abroad: whether it be cookies, waffles, milk snacks or cakes, 150,000 tons of baked products are produced every year. A sweet success story, because the salty snacks division of Bahlsen has been an independent company since 1999.

In search of possible ways to move the company further forward, Bahlsen came across a book on lean production. He was very quickly taken by the idea of lean production, and

discussed the matter with his friend Willem van Agtmael, the chief executive officer of the prestigious Stuttgart department store Breuninger and a long-time advocate of lean thinking. Van Agtmael brought Bahlsen and Dr. Wendelin Wiedeking together. The Porsche CEO recommended: “Have a chat with my people.” Porsche Consulting was ready.

The chat soon led to action. Even the consultants from Porsche Consulting had to do some rethinking. As the processes at Bahlsen are completely different from those in the automotive industry, the starting points for implementing the basic principles of lean production were of course different. Bahlsen: “The employees of Porsche Consulting also learned something here.” Nevertheless, the well-practiced procedure led to satisfactory results. Working alongside Bahlsen, KPIs were developed, a steering committee was formed, analyses were used to work out the starting points for lean production, the changes were addressed >

in workshops, and dedicated trainers received instruction. Bahlsen adds: “As we also included the works council in this process, there was great motivation right from the outset.” A game involving boxes was used to provide the employees with clear training on the basic principles involved. This also made it clear that nobody needed to fear for their job as a result of this streamlining. The goal of achieving tangible results as quickly as possible was met. For example, with the aid of Porsche Consulting, it proved possible to reduce set-up times on a machine for producing the famous butter cookies from forty-five minutes to just ten minutes.

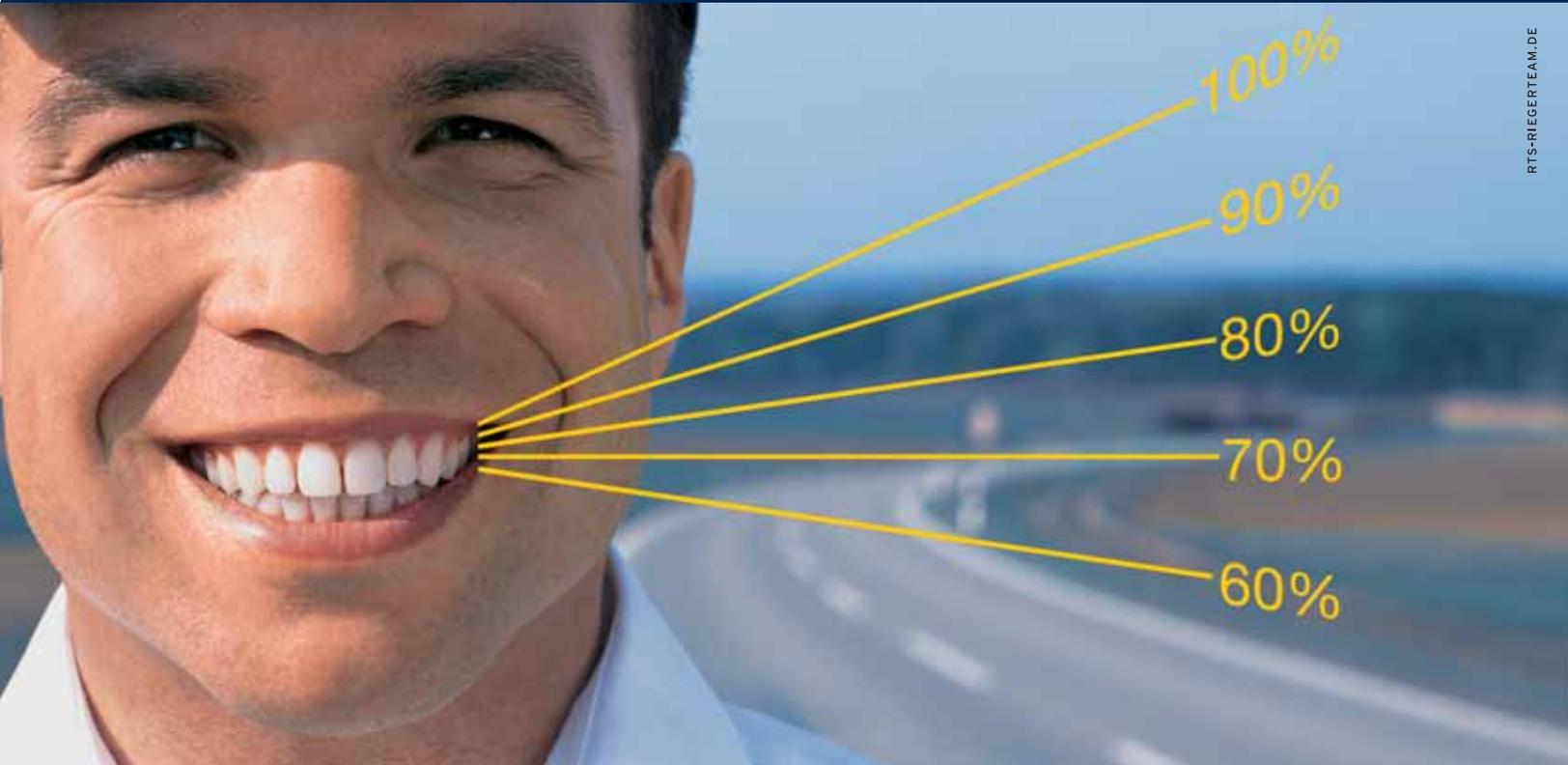
To ensure this joint success, the employees from Porsche Consulting also adjusted their working hours to correspond to those of the master bakers. Unfortunately, there is no hotel in the world that serves breakfast at 4 o'clock in the morning. But the upside of this was that in the factory the cookies were served fresh from the oven. The quality sam-

pling, disguised as simple tasting along the belt leaving the oven, was therefore carried out both practically and empirically at various factories.

The first steps have now been completed, and some thirty percent of the production lines have so far been restructured. But the working relationship will last for a number of years yet, according to Bahlsen. With a total of forty production lines with a wide range of different requirements, the entrepreneur is well aware that “you start from scratch each time.” A further reduction in lead times will continue to be a goal in the future. In the medium term, the company also wants to switch to order-based production. Up to now, products have been produced for stock. But Bahlsen has a vision: “In tomorrow's world, we want to incorporate the customer orders directly into the production process. After all, the golden rule applies to our cakes and biscuits too: They taste best when they are totally fresh.” <



Werner M. Bahlsen: “We must constantly modernize our business”



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