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TAKING THE HEAT OUT OF SEALING

Packaging Automation, long-time market leader in heat sealing, has launched a new machine specifically aimed at the medical and pharmaceutical markets to further strengthen its pre-eminence in the market place.

The company has been involved in the medical and pharmaceutical packaging sector for more than 20 years, more than enough time for it to establish the needs of companies large and small - and to build up the in-house skill, experience and technical know how to fulfill them.

Now all its skill and knowledge over two decades has gone into what is simply called the PA236, a code-number which hides a wealth of heat sealing skill achieved after long and painstaking market research.

Packaging Automation set out to meet the increasingly stringent regulations being dictated by the British Medical Association, America's Food and Drug Administration and the complexities of a welter of European Union legislation.

It needed to come up with something more than a little bit special because nowhere are the fastidious standards of the medical industry better highlighted than in the field of packaging of goods and equipment.

Rules and regulations are a potential minefield for the unwary. But the PA236 has been designed and built to such exacting standards that it takes all the worry out of the packaging of even such sensitive items as replacement hip and knee joints where for obvious reasons only the very highest standards of sterilisation and cleanliness are acceptable.

It provides the best ever control over heat sealing and lidding which meets the highest standards in operation anywhere around the globe - those set by the United States FDA. No wonder then that a whole host of medical and pharmaceutical companies are prepared to sing its praises.

Listen for a minute to the words of a senior executive of a top international company, who has asked to remain anonymous for commercial reasons but who is no less enthusiastic about the PA236 for that.

He says: "It is imperative that our entire process from start to finish meets all the regulations and stipulations of the medical industry's governing bodies. Therefore when we increased the range of products we manufacture on site and needed to purchase a new heat-sealing machine, we had a number of very strict pre-requisites which needed to be complied with to the letter. As well as meeting strict hygiene requirements the machine needed to be suitable for operation in a clean room environment, capable of sealing up to 40 different blisters and meet the FDA validation on the quality of the seal.

"We had had similar problems before and had turned to Packaging Automation for the solution and we knew the company could meet our rigid specifications.

So we went back to them this time and challenged them to deliver again. Needless to say they did after evaluating every factor in minute detail.”

Another satisfied customer is DePuy CMW whose production manager David Porter needed equipment to package its bone cement which is used in hip replacement surgery and which also has to adhere to the most exacting hygiene regulations.

DePuy has previously been blister packing the glass ampoules containing the liquid element of the bone-cement using a semi-automatic turntable machine which had been supplied by PA.

So, says David Porter, when it came to a replacement it was natural to return to the original supplier. His company was setting up a dedicated production line and wanted a blister packing machine which would increase production speed without compromising on the quality of the seals.

Mr Porter said: “The bone cement is presented as sterile into the operating theatre so it is vital the seals ensure product sterility, and the new system also had to be suitable for operation in a clean room environment.”

Packaging Automation suggested the conveyor fed PA236 and it has proved most effective, just as it did for the anonymous company.

It is a machine which was originally being developed for use in food manufacturing environments but it is so versatile it is eminently capable of adaptation so that it can be individually tailored to the blister packaging needs of a wide range of medical and pharmaceutical products.

It can achieve speeds of 21 sealed packs a minute, which is almost twice as many as some rivals and there is a guarantee of consistent seal quality throughout through in-built digital temperature control mechanisms and seal dwell time indicator. Seal parameters can be set and accurately monitored and they can be easily adjusted if required.

David Porter sums up: “Our relationship with Packaging Automation has always been good but it has been strengthened even further with the installation of the PA236. Production speed has increased and the system has met all out specifications to the full including clean room conditions and total product sterility. PA has consistently responded to any requests with speed and efficiency. The company has an exemplary after sales reputation which in our experience is more than justified.”

Packaging Automation does a lot of work with medical and personal care manufacturers but it is in the food manufacturing field that it can number household names among its customers.

PA’s technical sales engineer David Gill sees an expanding market for equipment like the 236 in the burgeoning medical and pharmaceutical fields. Knee and hip replacement parts are among the obvious items to benefit from the ultra-safe sealing the machinery can provide.

But, says Mr Gill, there are other things which need the strict adherence to sterility which

the PA236 provides, such as surgical instruments, medical dressings and large pharmaceutical products.

When it comes to getting technical Mr Gill makes no apologies for singing the praises of the PA236's data. "It has a calibrated time and temperature gauge and its pressure is also calibrated. It is run from compressed air which overcomes a traditional weakness in earlier equipment, that of consistency of seal. We have introduced a pressure transducer on to the seal cylinder to measure the force applied. And if it goes outside the pre-set parameters the affected package is rejected."

The new machine also provides a printed readout showing when an item was packaged, the operative concerned and the pressure of the seal which was used. This means that the requirement to keep manufacturing records for 30 years - in case of product defect - is easily met.

As an adjunct to the new equipment, PA has produced a revolutionary interactive CD-Rom which will guide pharmaceutical and medical equipment manufacturers through the intricate field of heat sealing.

It encompasses listings of PA's extensive range of state-of-the-art heat sealing machinery and detailed information on specialist areas like modified atmosphere packaging. It has been designed to encapsulate PA's extensive knowledge of the industry in a user-friendly format and contains recommendations and solutions to individual packaging requirements.

Company chairman Anthony Penn said: "As a leading producer of specialist heat sealing machinery for the food, medical and pharmaceutical markets, we are at the hub of a very complex business. We work closely with manufacturers, materials and tray suppliers, pack designers and retailers.

So in one guide we have tried to capture much of our experience and knowledge and have included technical advice in areas like the compatibility of packaging materials. The CD is an extension of our desire to make the whole process simpler, more accessible and easier to understand."

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