

## Making Big Business with Little Rolls



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"Dough must be handled carefully – but by strong machines." This motto forms the basis of the **Winkler** philosophy – made up of the know-how from the former traditional **Villinger company**, and from the baking machine manufacturer, **Winkler**. The **GBT Bäckerei Technologie** (German Bakery Technology) in Villingen-Schwenningen is a team that knows how this works. They supply industrial baking lines throughout the globe.

GBT knows how to respond to customer requirements. The systems that Villingen-Schwenningen now supplies to the world don't just produce bread and rolls. Flat unleavened bread, baguettes, ciabatta & co. – actually anything that concerns bread and can be produced industrially in large quantities – can be produced by the baking lines in Villingen. The GBT export ratio is a hefty 95 percent, and the customers in Kuwait, Dubai, Saudi-Arabia, Russia, South America, Eastern Europe and very much so in Spain, require the necessary flexibility.

*Wolfgang Fuhst* and *Peter Fischer*, the founders of GBT already had a number of foreign contacts when they worked at Winkler, especially in Spain, in the Middle East and in South America. And this is precisely where they picked up the thread with their new company. However, not in the construction of entire baking lines. They both knew that specialisation was the key. So the initial idea was: To offering planning and consulting services to the customers. But then everything took a different turn. The trust of an old Winkler customer in Spain gave them the impetus they needed.

The customer needed a fully automatic baguette unit that could produce 4500 baguettes per hour in a 24-hour

production run over seven days a week. This was a challenge. All the same, such a unit costs between two and three million Euros. But Fuhst and Fischer knew how to build such a machine, and, above all, where you could obtain the necessary parts for this. When a friend showed just as much trust in them by pre-financing the project, GBT suddenly were no longer planners, they were manufacturers. But GBT doesn't produce everything itself. Assemblies or even entire machines are bought in as separate components from specialists, they are then tested, partially fitted, and are sent on a journey to Kuwait, Brazil or Russia, where they are then finally assembled and commissioned by GBT specialists.

An industrial baking oven of this kind measures between 14 and 40 meters in length, and an entire line of dough kneading machines up to the finished rolls can often extend to between 80 or 100 meters. The lines are made up of a number of components, one behind the other, some of them are many meters long.

However, many of the core parts cannot be bought on the market and so they have to be developed, produced and built in by GBT itself. The wealth of experience stemming from the old Winkler times plays a considerable role here. After all, many of the 36 employees from the former Winkler staff - mechanics, fitters, software developers and engineers - were able to find work here after the company went bankrupt.

With the endless red tape required for worldwide export and sometimes very difficult Visa procurements for the management and fitters require a skilled office team. Wolfgang Fuhst: "You simply can't say: I'll just quickly fly off to Saudi Arabia and sell something there." It doesn't work like that. "Our people are all frequent fliers", laughs Wolfgang Fuhst, "you simply have to go where the market is." You need to take out a lot of time, especially for the Arabian customers. You must adapt to the customs, accept certain ceremo-



The managing-directors of GBT (from the left to the right) Peter Fischer and Wolfgang Fuhst

nies, and carry out long and patient negotiations. But they are fair and solvent business partners. "And a handshake counts as a promise there."

So far, the most expensive individual contract was to supply three flat unleavened bread machines to Kuwait for 6.5 million Euros (USD 9.1 million). GBT is proud to have developed for the Middle East an oven for Arabian flat unleavened bread that boasts top temperatures of 550 degrees in the baking area and baking times from 3 to 60 seconds. But as Fuhst points out, they took a great risk here. "But the oven works and we've now sold 20 of them." There was also the certificate from Kuwait to say that the company is considered an "efficient partner that has ensured that the bread for the people is even better".

And so business is still (or again) being made in Villingen from the original DERBY technology back in 1932, the pioneering invention of grandfather *Fridolin Winkler* – for Fuhst this is still the best in the world. The DERBY has of course been further developed, but everything is based on the cornerstone of the Winkler technology from back then, from the invention by grandfather, *Fridolin Winkler*. ■

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