

Seal the deal

Ready-to-eat foods manufacturer invests in top-notch sealing machinery to ensure optimal product quality and extended shelf-life for its culinary creations

No business understands the convenience that comes from delicious ready-to-eat meals better than family-owned **Au P'tit Marché Traiteur Inc.**, a privately held food manufacturing company based out in the suburb of Boucherville, Que.

A member-company of **Aliments du Québec**, Au P'tit Marché was founded back in 2003 in a different location and focused solely on prepared frozen meals.

When the company saw an increase in demand for spaghetti sauce in 2005, Au P'tit Marché broadened their product selections to include fresh products such as their ready-to-eat varieties, frozen soups and pies, as well as an assortment of pasta sauces.

Having moved to their current Boucherville location in 2014, the 10,000-squarefoot facility houses 20 employees working one shift five days a week, which may increase to two production shifts as the business continues to grow.



“Au P'tit Marché started growing quickly,” says plant director Daniel Trottier. “We went from a \$100,000 worth of revenue to about \$2.5 million in a matter of about six years.”

Even though Trottier joined the Au P'tit Marché team about five years ago, he came to the plant with over 30 years experience and noticed quickly that the facility's choice to use shrink wrapping as the method to package their products were dated

and tedious.

“When I came here, pretty much everything was done by hand and the problem with that is that everything is obviously done one-by-one and it takes times,” Trottier told **Canadian Packaging** in a recent interview.

“From the minute I started to work here, I said that the only way to improve and increase our sales and business is to get machines to help, which would not happen if we kept on doing it by hand.

“Basically, it would be like going back in time where companies like us could hire 50 people to do the job of three, but now we need three to do the job of 50.”

This realization commenced Trottier’s search for the perfect machine for the Au P’tit Marché facility.

Trottier began canvassing for machines by shopping around at different trade show events and conferences in Montreal and Toronto, as well as scouring the Internet.

Trottier shares that he also talked to friends and people he knew who worked in the food industry and did different types of business that could point him in the direction of different machines and different companies.



As a self-proclaimed “tough cookie” with a disdain for failure, Trottier needed a guarantee that he was being shown machines that were going to benefit Au P’tit Marché in the long run.

“If the machines I buy causes me to either have downtime or have problems with it, I can be a not so fun guy to be around,” Trottier says with a laugh.

“I needed to make sure that all of the products were there and that it was going to help our business get

ahead.”

When Trottier first met Eric Williamson the president of **Stock Packaging Canada Inc.**, a leading supplier of rigid trays and containers, flexible packaging films, pouches and machinery, at last year’s **SIAL Montreal** show, everything fell into place.

“We sat down with him and discussed our need and we were on that aspect extremely well served because the people at Stock are extremely competent,” Trottier recounts.

“There was the feeling that we were getting the right information, and Eric was answering all of our questions, and listening to all of our worries.”

Serving the food and pharmaceutical industries for over 30 years, the focus of Stock Canada’s business is MAP (modified atmosphere packaging) solutions, as well as acting as the Canadian dealer for **Reepack** machines, which include thermopackers and tray-sealers.

“When a client comes to us, they usually quickly realize that they don’t need to go anywhere else for anything else on their project unless there is a specific need to,” says Williamson.

“We’re able to give them the expertise on everything that they need to make that project work.”

During the initial consultation with Williamson and his team, Trottier was looking at a different machine that Stock Canada was selling.

After listening to the needs of Au P'tit Marché, Williamson advised against the original machine and instead redirected Trottier to the **Reepack ReeMatic150**, a single chamber MAP tray sealer with wide conveyor that seals trays in automatic modes.

Branded as the “war horse” machine, the *ReeMatic150* has been manufactured and sold since the company’s humble beginnings.



While there have been a number of technological updates and encroachments throughout the years, the *ReeMatic150* has remained one of Reepack’s most proven machines, thanks to its noteworthy reputation for postulating steadfastness and assiduousness.

“Before this machine, when we would produce fresh products like lasagne or shepherd’s pie, it would take me basically 40 per cent of my working time to get five-per cent of my revenue, which makes no sense,” Trottier says.

“With the *ReeMatic150*, I’m now able to get just under 20 per cent of my working time to go get all of this production done and more.

“It allows me to do ten times, if not twenty times, more production and packaging any given day.”

Designed as a plug-and-play machine, there was no fuss when the *ReeMatic150* was installed.

“We have machines that are pre-engineered,” Williamson explains.

“At the beginning of a project, customers don’t have a lot of the surprises and problems and tweaking that they’ll need with other kinds of machines, so they can start their project hassle-free.”

Running the *ReeMatic150* has also been proven to be a comprehensible experience for Au P'tit Marché facility workers.

When production begins, the operators will place the trays with product on the infeed conveyor and the conveyor brings the trays automatically into the sealing chamber.

When the trays are in the sealing chamber, the operators pull a vacuum to a very specific set point and gas is reinjected to an incredibly specific set point and then the product is sealed.

Once vacuum-packed, the finished product gets transferred onto an outfeed conveyor, which then moves the trays out of the machine and transfers them onto the downstream equipment.

Since installing the *ReeMatic150*, Trottier has seen significant increase in sales, as well as better quality of the product that comes off the conveyor.

Trottier also discerned that the *ReeMatic150's* comprehensible interfaces benefited his operators who did not speak English as a first language.

“For some machines, all of the instructions come on the screen with words and asking you commands in English, but I’ve got workers that don’t speak English and that can be a problem,” Trottier elucidates.

“The *ReeMatic150* is very user-friendly, it’s easy to understand, and it’s easy to change the tooling out of it.”



Not only has the installation of the *ReeMatic150* resulted in a completely transformed method of business for Au P’tit Marché, it has also strengthened their professional relationship with Stock Canada.

For his part, Trottier was impressed with Stock Canada’s constant guidance and helpfulness to them before, during and after selecting and installing the *ReeMatic150*.

Stock Canada continues to follow up with Au P’tit Marché and assists them quickly when they run into problems.

“We had an issue at the beginning with one electrical component, and it was fixed,” Trottier recounts. “It didn’t take a month, it didn’t take two weeks, it didn’t even take a week—it only took three days.

“Whether it’s sales, after-sale service, or whether its because we now buy containers from Stock as well, they are extremely well-organized.”

Now part of his close-knit network, Stock Canada has become Trottier’s first choice when he eventually begins to shop for machinery in the future for Au P’tit Marché.

“It becomes a relationship,” Trottier says. “If you can’t build a relationship with a supplier, I don’t understand why anybody would do business with suppliers that are not interested in doing business with them.

Concludes Trottier: “I’m not going to start fooling around and shopping around if Stock Canada can help me with what I’m looking for.”