

The History Of Packaging Machinery

The origins and ideas behind packaging machinery are complex. After all, go back in history one hundred years and who needed it, I ask. You had the man in the local grocery store in his brown coat who would do all that sort of thing. He weighed your meat, your rice, your fruit and veg, and your vinegar and then he wrapped them all for you in brown paper. A godsend to Jack and Jill but stories told through the generations will tell you that this man was under immense pressure. He was the 'One Stop' shop for the whole town and supplied all your culinary needs as well as your coal for heating, haberdashery needs and he also acted as a hardware store. Trying to keep up demand for all this without packaging machinery must have been a veritable nightmare. There was no conveyor belt to speed things along. There was no plastic carrier bags for him to sling at customers to pack themselves. And there was no sullen face that sulked should he have to do something for his customers. Shopkeepers today just don't know they're born. For the customers of olden days, particularly the elderly, the local grocer was the only person they spoke to in a day and he provided their only source of comfort in what would otherwise be a lonely existence. He would stand and chat while he collected their goods from his shelves. He would then carefully wrap them while diagnosing their ailments or lamenting the behaviour of young people and see his customers off, even opening the door for them. The old time grocer may have had a long day but he certainly would have felt a sense of pride in the fact that he had made these people happy, supplied all their needs for a day and given that personal touch with the wrapping and chatting. How did things change so much in the last one hundred years and who, exactly, called for this change? A visit to the shops is not the same anymore. So many shops specialise in only one thing that it can take up to eight different shops to supply a day's needs. Every item you buy will be shrink wrapped by packaging machinery that has been programmed by an origami expert and will require a surgeons degree to get into. Today's customers have little contact with the shop keeper. If they're lucky they may receive a grunt from them which will just about suffice in the signal that they are still alive. Food wrapped in plastic by food packaging machinery is silently slung at us so we can pack it in more plastic, the type guaranteed to remove digits on the way home. When we get home we will break out the industrial strength scissors that we bought from the specialist scissor shop that now has to carry a licence to sell such dangerous goods. We can then waste half an hour of our lives trying to get into our food, thus aiding the weight loss diet because we eventually give it up as a bad job. Still, at least we can sit down and relax with the daily newspaper and read about how plastic packaging contains carcinogenic agents and that this might just shorten our lives. The answer, apparently, is to use recyclable packaging that is bio-degradable and user friendly. So, that will be brown paper then?

About the Author

Environmental expert Catherine Harvey looks at the role of packaging machinery in preparing food for market. To find out more please visit <http://www.superiorfoodmachinery.com/>

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