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Technology for Today's Food Production & Packaging Market

## NICHE MARKETS: One Bakery's Bread & Butter

How Orlando Baking Company used Old World traditions and new equipment investments to find its niche.

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## COVER STORY

# NICHE MARKETS: One Bakery's Bread & Butter

A strong focus on variety and originality has helped the 137-year old Orlando Baking Company grow from a small, family-run bakery to the largest wholesale specialty bakery between New York and Chicago.

Karen Langhauser, Editor-in-Chief

**F**ounded in the remote town of Castel di Sangro, Italy, in 1872, Orlando Baking Company moved part of its family, as well as its Old World tradition of baking, to Cleveland, OH in 1904. After several location changes throughout the city of Cleveland in order to accommodate the growing business, the family-owned company currently operates out of a recently expanded 200,000 square foot facility.

With its age comes wisdom, as the 137-year old company has constantly adapted in order to stand the test of time. The current facility has eight makeup lines feeding its six ovens, with most lines automated to the point of only necessitating three or four workers. However, Orlando still prides itself in doing a portion of the shaping and

forming by hand, in order to preserve quality and stay true to the Old World breads and European style that have kept customers loyal throughout the decades.

While increasing capacity is important, it's not everything at Orlando, which estimates that its bread reaches 3,000 customers each day. "A typical American bakery can produce around 10,000 loaves of bread per hour. We are operating at around 2,200 loaves per hour," says John Anthony Orlando, a 5th generation Orlando and current VP of Operations.

### Niching success

Instead of mass producing at extreme rates, Orlando Baking has taken a different approach to

success. In 1987, Orlando brought Ciabatta – an Italian bread with a crisp crust and distinct flavor – to the U.S., making them the first bakery in the country to offer this Italian tradition. To assure production accuracy, Orlando brought bakers over from Italy to teach and oversee the process, which at the time, was done entirely by hand.

In the early 90's, as demand grew, Orlando developed an automated Ciabatta line to cut and shape the bread. The machine increased production capacity by enabling the plant to produce bigger batches, while still preserving quality.

"Our initial Ciabatta processing line was the first in the country and the fourth in the world," notes John Anthony.

Even with the automated Ciabatta line hard at work, Orlando remained faithful to its 24-hour process of making the bread, where the baker "sets a sponge" one day then allows it to rest in a cooler, only to be remixed and baked the next day. Setting a sponge involves mixing ingredients and allowing the yeast to ferment while the mixture rests, thus adding both flavor and texture to the bread.

### Equipment investments

As more bakeries in the U.S. started producing Ciabatta bread, Orlando recognized the further need to expand capacity while still retaining quality. In 2007, the company underwent its largest expansion project to date, adding additional, state-of-the-art equipment to the plant.

One addition was the Rheon line. This equipment (which as its name implies is technologicaly-based on the concept of rheological engineering) is designed to form bread without damaging the dough. With no mechanical force applied to the dough, high-quality breads can be created without chemical additives.



John Anthony Orlando shows off hearth baked Italian breads coming out of a 100-foot tunnel oven.

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Another important addition was the Mecatherm make-up line, proofer and three-deck tunnel oven. The oven has the smallest footprint in the plant, yet achieves the highest output. The modular line is composed of several baking cells, each one an independent oven with individual temperature and humidity controls, which essentially breaks the baking process down into steps. This makes it possible to adjust oven capacity to different hourly outputs or baking times.

"The new equipment allowed us to almost duplicate what we were doing ten years ago by hand, while at the same time increasing capacity and producing a more consistent product," said John Anthony.

The plant also added a paperless distribution system for warehouse management purposes. Inventory is entered into a computer system and then each delivery truck's shipments are posted on a digital display above numbered warehouse doors. The organized system is necessary, as Orlando fills and empties an entire 20,000 square foot warehouse on a daily basis.

### Constant variety

The expansion project also equipped the facility to handle a wider product variety, including niche items for restaurants and private label items.

"We pride ourselves in doing things other bakeries do not do. We have found our niche by

offering different sizes and shapes and varieties," states John Anthony. "We are constantly opening

new avenues to sell new, different products."

In fact, Orlando offers over 250 varieties of breads and rolls. Recent innovations include garlic Ciabatta bread and garlic Italian rolls.

The popularity of Orlando's garlic products has grown so much the plant now has four topping lines and almost an entire production room — originally set up for ingredient storage — dedicated to frozen garlic bread, rolls, sticks and Texas Toast.

"When we started our garlic bread production in the early 90's we were thinking small, but it has developed into an extremely popular niche market for us," says John Anthony.

Product variety has also helped the bakery eliminate waste. For example, the heels of the garlic toast — which are not used in the toast — are cut off and used for croutons. Other edible scrap from the baking process is collected and used to make breadcrumbs.

### Flexibility

Flexibility also gives Orlando a competitive advantage. A portion of the equipment in the plant is on wheels. This enables workers to move lines around as necessary, in a matter of minutes, cre-



A portion of the dough shaping and forming is still done by hand at Orlando.

ating a constantly changing and evolving production room.

"The production rooms are works in progress," says John Anthony. "Think of it as highly organized chaos," he jokes.

This plant's physical flexibility is perhaps a reflection of the owners' mindsets, as they pride themselves in being open to new ideas from customers. Orlando is often approached by customers or potential customers who want a specific bread product that the bakery does not yet offer, and the bakery remains open to these opportunities.

"Our company is constantly looking for new niches. We aim to offer a little bit of everything. Custom products have been another very successful niche for us," says John Anthony.

The right mix of Old World traditions and fresh ideas has brought Orlando Baking Company five generations of continued success. The ability to find and pursue niche markets has proven to be key throughout the company's rich history.

"Our future goals are to continue to build our frozen distribution coast to coast and build partnerships with our customers on our current products and new ideas." ♦

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