

## That's A Wrap

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### **Assessing your facility's needs relative to stretch wrapping equipment — and how to justify the investment.**

Is the amount of load damage going up with the age of your stretch wrap equipment? Having trouble keeping up with production and the increasing number of SKUs and load configurations? Have a need to do more with less people and feel automation might be the answer? Would you save money on film and eliminate film breaks if you could just improve performance?

If any of these questions have crossed your mind, then it's time to seriously consider how to justify a new stretch wrap machine. In today's economy, it's unlikely your company is just handing over money for new capital equipment. Budgets are tight and every department is competing for the reduced dollars available. The good news is that there are many ways to justify the cost of a new pallet wrapper and prove a quick return on your investment.

### **The Right Fit**

It's important to consider what type of stretch wrapper is best suited for your specific application. Think about the size, weight, and variability of the loads you will be wrapping. Highly variable loads would benefit from certain types of machinery, such as orbital, horizontal wrappers that secure the load most securely to the pallet. Stable, light-weight loads of consumer goods would do well with a turntable style wrapper, while unstable or heavy loads would do better with a rotary arm machine. For the best all-around performance, rotary ring machines can handle heavy and variable loads, such as construction supplies, pet food, and beverages, while still handling the highest volume lines.

### **Need for Speed**

One should consider the production speeds required. If moving from a hand wrap application to simple automation, a semi-automatic stretch wrapper may be all that is required. Although these machines still require a person to manually attach the film to the load at the beginning of the wrap cycle and cut the film at the end of the cycle, they can achieve rates as high as 35 loads per hour. The labor reduction or improved productivity may justify the relatively low cost of these machines.

If you've outgrown your existing stretch wrapper or are adding production, a fully automatic stretch wrapper may meet your needs best. While these machines typically cost more, the savings in labor, improved productivity, and increased versatility may easily justify this type of machine. Whether you choose a highly

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automated ring wrapper that can achieve speeds as high as 150 loads per hour or you prefer the redundancy of two lower volume machines in parallel can depend on available space, labor costs, and maintenance expenses.

### **Living in a Material World**

It is important to understand the material savings that can be achieved with a new stretch wrapper. Payback can be quick for equipment that allows you to reduce film usage. These savings are also, typically, the easiest to quantify. For example, film usage can be reduced by almost 30 percent when purchasing a new machine that would improve the amount of film pre-stretch from 150 to 250 percent.

Equipment design can also have a major effect on film usage. Almost all automatic turntable and rotary arm machines have a fixed clamp that requires the machine to start and stop at the bottom of the load. A rotary ring type machine has the flexibility to start and stop anywhere on the load. This can result in 25 percent film savings — often more than enough to justify a new machine. New machines may also offer opportunities to reduce the number of wraps or move to thinner films. Plus, for companies accounting for sustainability improvements as part of their evaluation, they will likely benefit from the thousands of pounds of film that can be saved.

### **A Load of Savings**

Although film reductions can result in thousands of dollars in savings, it may pale in comparison to the money saved by eliminating load damage and reducing interruptions in production. Study results indicate that annual average unsaleable rates, as a percent of gross sales, are .96 percent for manufacturers, with nearly half of this as a result of damage. Improving load containment could quickly pay back the expense of a new machine — while making the customer much happier.

Likewise, by understanding the cost of production downtime, the justification for a new wrapper may be simple. Production stoppages can cost some companies in excess of \$50 per minute. At this rate, eliminating even 20 minutes of downtime a week could pay for a new fully automatic wrapper very quickly.

### **New Technology Offers New Reasons to Buy**

New technologies in stretch wrapping provide new ways to justify new equipment. Add-ons can provide automatic and affordable brand identification. Additional labor savings can be achieved by adding an automatic film roll changer or spare carriage that allows for less frequent film changeovers and improved productivity. Performance monitoring systems provide assurance that the optimal amount of film will be applied to each and every load. Advances in film tension control can allow for variability throughout the wrap cycle to help reduce load damage and eliminate film breaks. Including an integrated top sheet or automated corner board applicator may eliminate enough labor to easily rationalize the cost of a new stretch wrapper.

### **Selection in Action**

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Every situation is different, but trained representatives can identify the best equipment choice for different scenarios. For example, Hensley Beverage Company had different challenges: Oddly shaped loads and loads encompassing several different products and sizes that would benefit greatly from variable film tension. ITW's Octopus 808 machine solved these concerns because it applies just the right amount of tension at various points on the load. Manufacturers and distributors such as Hensley can rest-assured that they are reducing product damage while simultaneously lowering film costs.

Instead of operating with a single tension setting, variable tension control machines like the Octopus 808 allow for increased tension at locations on the load that require extra hold (the base of a sturdy box) and lighter tension where reduced force is beneficial (sharp corners, the top of an open box). Hensley Beverage Company has estimated that the Octopus 808 machine has saved the company about 1.5 men a day.

### **Think Globally**

Suppliers, distributors, and end-user clients are all partners in the supply chain, and consistency benefits each step along the way. Finding a partner that can provide a worldwide network of support and global solutions goes a long way in creating consistency. Standardizing equipment can translate into reduced downtime due to faster repairs and shorter parts sourcing turnaround time. Dealing with one vendor instead of many is always more efficient, and the consistent delivery of your products will be appreciated by customers, because it will allow their processes to be more consistent as well.

By working with a company that offers a full breadth of global solutions and an expertise in quantifying economic justifications, you might be closer to that new stretch wrapper than you ever imagined.

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