

What's your device?

Gadgets and gizmos used in the baking trade can enhance business efficiency and save time. Andrew Don finds out which ones are proving most popular with bakers.

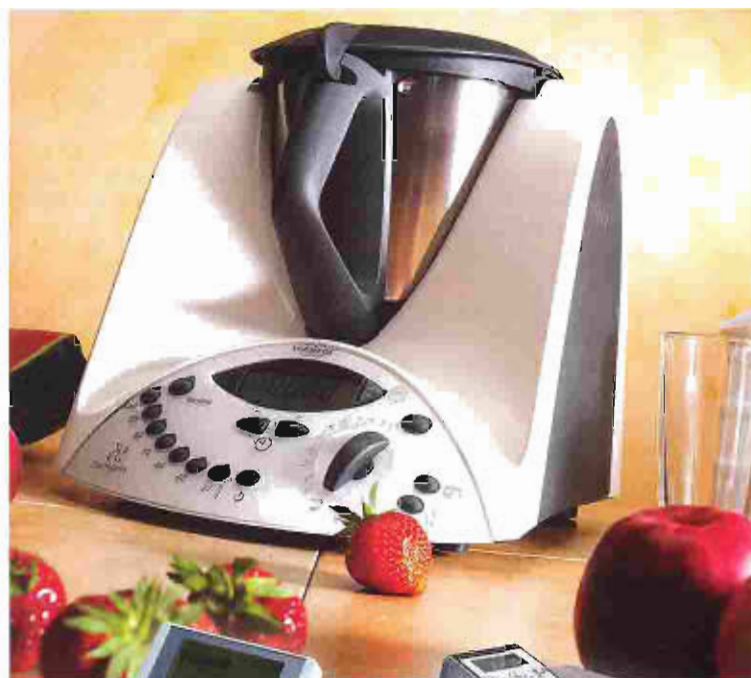
The best gadgets for the bakery trade come from overseas – at least that is what Richard Waterfield, chairman of Lancashire-based bakery group Waterfields believes.

Waterfield visits a couple of exhibitions each year, where he looks for gadgets that will help give the 47-store operation a point of difference. "There is little innovation from this country. Much of it comes from abroad, because most bakeries abroad are craft rather than industrial," he says. The latest gadget he bought was an apple-coring machine from France that slices, cores and peels 15 apples a minute.

Number-shaped non-stick silicone foam, designed for the domestic market, is a boon for baking-off numbers and letters for parties rather than having to cut them out from a sheet of sponge, he says. And Waterfield is fond of the trays produced by French company Matfer, which enable him to cut out 150 small shortbread hearts, for example, in a single sheet for pinning out. "We are an industrial bakery but also a craft baker, and the gizmos allow us to produce the little touches that keep us different from the big boys."

Visual help

John Slattery, managing director of Slattery's, in Whitefield, Manchester, well-known for its chocolates, cakes and impressive dining room, sets great store by Apple's iPad, which he says is great for



carrying about photographs that he can flick through and show to customers. He is also fond of the Thermomix, a super-fast food blender and processor, which weighs, cooks, simmers and steams. "It's useful for small amounts of things, such as custards, sauces and ganaches. You can put all the ingredients in at once, set the temperature and time and leave it alone."

Another device of which Slattery is fond is his Robot Coupe, which speeds up shredding vegetables for soups, sandwiches and meals in the dining room, and the CountEasy, which counts the money in the office and speeds up tillage in the evening. "We can throw all the change on to it and it counts notes, too. It's a handy gadget that saves a lot of time."

Perhaps most novel is the Hurricone that he has only just bought from a trade show – a large plastic cone mounted on a fan with a sign that says 'Caution, wet floor', for placing in the shop in front of the main door when it is wet. "It's very large and it blows cold air, which dries the floor. It's functional, but it is more the fact that we are doing what we should be doing by having a big sign saying 'Please mind your step'. And we are trying to do something about it by drying the floor at the same time."

Chris Tonkins, owner of Kistrucks Bakery, in east London, is fond of crimp wire joiners for fixing elements in the ovens and a G Clamp electronic meter for reading the amperage to ensure the ovens are functioning correctly. "It's a two-second job and easy," he says. He uses a flour bap docker from Victorian times, which is full of nails and useful for leaving pin pricks in the centre of the bap to stop it peeling.

"I also have a piping tube that has a cone in the centre, which is what

Nano-hygiene

Nottingham Trent University's (NTU) School of Science and Technology has linked with Holbeach Campus at the University of Lincoln in a bid to develop a permanent spray-on nanotechnology coating for food preparation surfaces that will kill or reduce the growth of bacteria, germs and other bugs.

The project is one of five Collaborative Research and Development grants announced the Food and Drink iNet, which co-ordinates innovation support for businesses, universities and individuals working in the food and drink sector in the East Midlands.

Dr Fengge Gao, reader in nanotechnology at NTU, said the success of the development could lead to immediate commercial application.




Clockwise from far left: the Thermomix food blender and processor; Allen Coding's PR5 handset; the Speedwrap cling film dispenser; Metcalfe's Hotmix PRO; the Sato TH2 label printer

we make religieuses from. It's a handy piping tube and very unusual. I got it from France when I did my apprenticeship in 1975."

Hobbs House Bakery, like Slattery's, enthuses about the iPad, which it uses on the road for planning routes and for the customer relationship side of the business, because, as director Tom Herbert argues, a big computer can put a barrier between you and the customer. "The iPad is so small... it aids our conversations with customers and we use it for training in the shop sites we are selling to, in order to explain our products in sales pitches."

Herbert is also keen on the laser thermometer, which is handy when doing bread demonstrations or working in other people's kitchens to check the temperature. "People often haven't seen them before. It helps with accuracy and finding cold and hot spots in ovens."

Hobbs has just ordered a label printer, which prints the label out in a reel as opposed to A4 sheets. And, in the past year, it has bought an old Artotex – an old-style mixer that mixes at a slower pace and cooler temperature, which Hobbs says produces better doughs.

Everyone has their wish-list for gadgets and gizmos and London Food Machinery managing director Ian Ort is no exception. "It would be great to use your iPhone or iPad as scales," he says. *British Baker*, however, does not recommend putting food ingredients anywhere near these devices. It would probably invalidate the warranty! 

The best of the rest

- The aub200h easy-to-clean phone by Doro of Sweden, which has a flat membrane keypad.
- Hotmix PRO from Metcalfe, which chops, purées, liquidises, blends or mixes ingredients quickly while simultaneously heating and cooking at temperatures between 25°C and 130°C – ideal for creating creams, sauces, jams or soups.
- The PR5 handset from Allen Coding Systems for controlling bar coding, featuring a USB interface to allow quick uploading and downloading.
- Prowrap's new Speedwrap cling film and aluminium foil dispenser, which can be cleaned in a commercial dishwasher.
- Contacto's salad spinner.
- Grunberg's Pro Balance chefs' knives with adjustable balance.
- Htec's GemPOINTS loyalty system for small retailers using secure smartcard technology without the need for high-end IT infrastructure, and incorporating a terminal the size of a paperback.
- TH2 label printer from SATO.
- The DTR (Delivery Temperature Recorder) printing thermometer providing hard-copy evidence of temperature and associated data.

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