

PRESS ARTICLE

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Willowton Group switches to inhouse PET bottle production for sunflower oil with Sidel blowers



After working for many years with local converters, Willowton Group (Willowton) in South Africa has increased its production volumes and revolutionised its sunflower oil brand, Sunfoil, thanks to Sidel's expertise in PET blowing and packaging design.

Founded in 1970, Willowton is a family-owned business in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. With its innovative approach and hands-on attitude, Willowton has established itself as one of Africa's leading oil seed processors and edible oil packers. It is the top edible oil manufacturer in South Africa, too, and it owns the country's leading sunflower oil brand, Sunfoil. Thanks to its in-house oil refinery that has been in operation for over four decades, this regional powerhouse also produces edible oil for retail brands.

To increase its yearly production volumes and differentiate its Sunfoil brand from traditional edible oil brands with generic container shapes, Willowton decided to partner with Sidel to produce its PET containers in-house. To achieve this, the company acquired two Sidel EvoBLOW™ standalone blowers and relied on Sidel's packaging design skills and experience to help it develop customised family bottle shapes.

Superior production flexibility

One of the many benefits these new standalone blowers offer is a more independent bottle production set-up. The equipment also enables efficient production planning and reduces warehouse space. The SBO 16 EvoBLOW produces a 2 L format while the SBO 10 EvoBLOW produces all bottle formats up to 1 L. As the latter manages various bottle formats, Willowton

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also chose to install a mould Bottle Switch™ system to conduct ultrarapid bottle changeovers. “This easy way to adapt our oil production to the fast-moving market demands contribute to a great production flexibility,” comments Faisal Modi, Operations Manager at Willowton. This system is based on repeatable, tool-free operations that mean the operator spends only 30 seconds per cavity, thereby increasing production flexibility, equipment availability and production uptime. Both machines can operate at an efficiency level of 99.5% regardless of the End-of-Line performance, thanks to the production buffer created by the storage silos located on the lines. “With those two blowers, we already increased our yearly production volume by 50% and we are ready to handle any future additional demand as well,” explains Faisal Modi. In order to meet consumer expectations in terms of superior hygiene standards, the two Sidel blowers have been equipped with different options to ensure production integrity. These include preform dedusting, air filtration, air recovery and automatic centralised greasing.

New, distinctive family bottle design with a drop logo

Starting from a series of modern designs that were developed using bottle drafts and digital mock-ups, technical designs and prototypes with 3D printed models, the new elegant, cylindrical Sunfoil silhouette with a drop logo engraved on the bottle shoulders was created. This bottle is more practical as its belt-inspired design and reduced diameter make it easier to handle. The new shape has been applied to different family bottle sizes, including 375 ml, 500 ml, 750 ml and 2 L (a rectangular bottle). The latter was the most challenging format because blowing a rectangular bottle without any specific preferential heating blowing process affects the structural rigidity of the container. Sidel therefore conducted various packaging evaluation and qualification tests on the 2 L bottle, including Finite Element Analysis (FEA) and feasibility trials to improve its strength and performance across supply chain simulations. The bottles are equipped with push fitting or screw closures.

“Implementing this project went particularly smoothly and we are all really happy with the result,” commented Faisal Modi. To make the most of the blowers’ operation, Sidel also organised training courses for the Willowton operators before and after the equipment validation process. They were performed by Sidel local technical experts on-site and empowered the Willowton team enhancing their skills while reinforcing trust between Sidel and Willowton.

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Sidel is a leading provider of equipment and services solutions for packaging beverage, food, home and personal care products in PET, can, glass and other materials.

With over 40,000 machines installed in more than 190 countries, we have nearly 170 years of proven experience, with a strong focus on the factory of tomorrow with advanced systems, line engineering and innovation. Our 5,500+ employees worldwide are passionate about providing solutions that fulfil customer needs and boost the **performance** of their lines, products and businesses.

Delivering this level of performance requires that we stay flexible. We continuously ensure we **understand** our customers' changing challenges and commit to meeting their unique performance and sustainability goals. We do this through dialogue and by understanding the needs of their markets, production and value chains. In turn, we apply our solid technical knowledge and smart data analytics to ensure lifetime productivity reaches its full potential.

We call it **Performance through Understanding**.

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