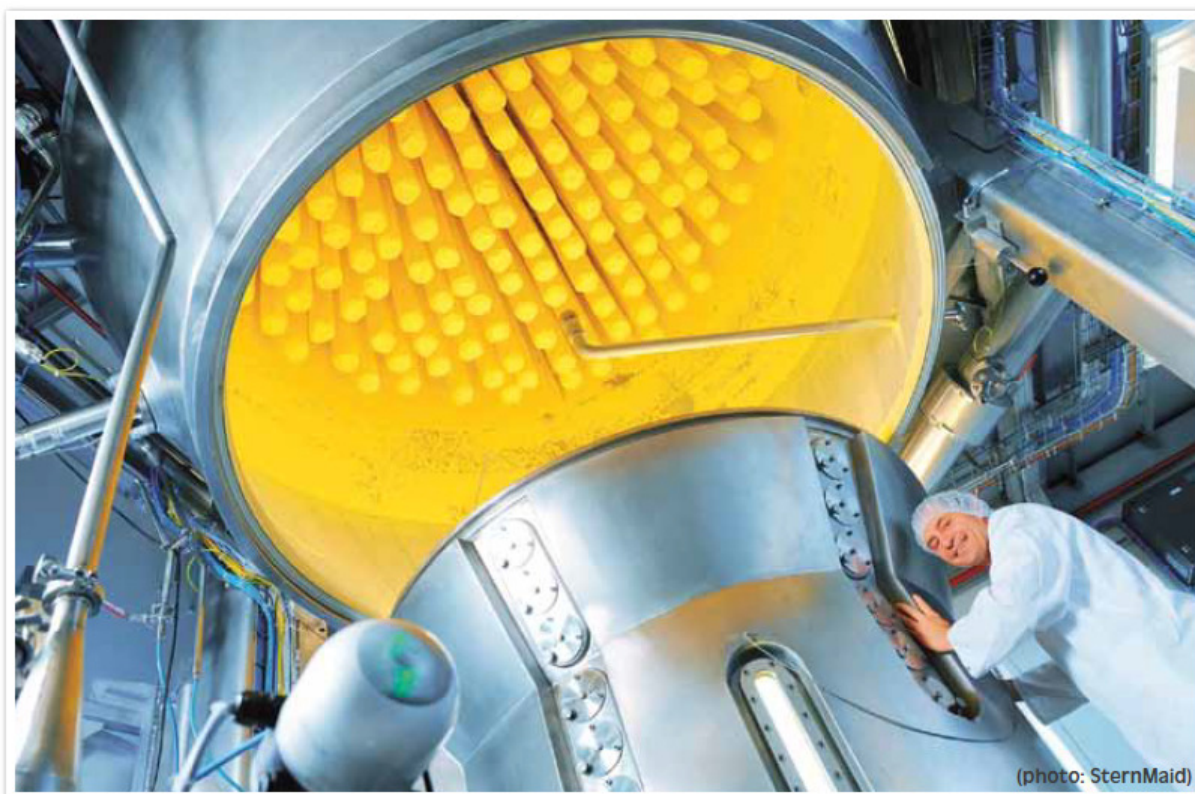


# Contract manufacturing is a matter of trust

SternMaid in interview

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**T**he products on the market are becoming more and more complex; functional foods have become an established part of our lives. This results in constantly changing demands on the production process. For small companies, especially, and for manufacturers with a rapidly changing portfolio it is a challenge to instal costly equipment or to introduce state-of-the-art technology. So it may be a sensible move to outsource production, as Mark Riemer from SternMaid explains. This is what the Commercial Director from the contract manufacturing firm has to tell the International Dairy Magazine about fluid bed technology and the outsourcing solutions offered by his company.

**IDM:** Mr. Riemer, for many companies outsourcing presents a real challenge, because ultimately it means handing over responsibility. How does SternMaid deal with that?

**MR:** Above all, our customers must be able to trust us. So it's important to show them what we can do as soon as they make their first inquiries. We have very close contacts with our customers from the start. Our offer begins with consultancy. We arrange a personal meeting to explain the most efficient ways of integrating our services into the customer's production process. We coordinate activities regularly even at the planning stage. That

creates the basis for a good, long-term business relationship. Experience has shown that our reliability and our specialist knowledge of powder handling are what really counts when it comes to arranging cooperation.

**IDM:** How can your customers benefit by outsourcing their production?

**MR:** In principle we clear the way for the customer's core activities such as development, marketing and sales. By outsourcing specific tasks the customer can reduce the workload on his company and release capacity. For example, some goods require complex production processes or special technologies that are not available to the company or cannot be introduced quickly enough at its own facility.

**IDM:** What technologies are you thinking of in particular?

**MR:** Fluid bed technology, for example. It has become an extremely important formulation method in the food industry. Since it permits drying, coating, agglomeration and granulation it is possible to adjust and standardize the product attributes optimally, just as the customer needs or wishes. We make this technology available to our customers without any additional investment on their part. We can carry out trials on a laboratory scale in order to develop new products or optimize existing ones. Commercial production then takes place in one of the most multifunctional fluid bed processors on the market. This industrial unit permits both batch and continuous operation.

**IDM:** One of the focal points of SternMaid's range of services is dairy products – from premixes to finished whey drinks. What advantages does fluid bed technology offer in this field?

**MR:** Our fluid bed processor makes it possible to transform poorly soluble powders into agglomerates that dissolve much more readily in water – think of instantized cocoa drinks or soluble coffee, for example. In the agglomeration process, fine powder particles are stuck together with a liquid to form blackberry-like structures. Moistening of the surface of the particles and simultaneous drying results in free-flowing agglomerates. This makes it possible to produce optimally portionable powders with a minimum of dust for drink dispensers, or readily dispersible dried milk. Agglomeration also prevents separation of the individual constituents during processing. Combinations of milk powder, sugar, instant coffee and flavourings then constitute a readily soluble compound for the drink dispenser, without a tendency to separate. Moreover, it's possible to realize all manner of different recipes by varying the sprayed liquid. For example, beverage specialities like "3 in 1" – in other words: coffee including milk and sugar – can be made up in a single unit. And the flavourings are firmly encapsulated in the agglomerate for better protection against oxidation and loss of taste.

**IDM:** Speaking of flavourings: is this technology suitable for sensitive ingredients too?

**MR:** It certainly is. A further point in favour of fluid bed technology is its ability to process the products gently without impairing the functional and nutritional properties of the ingredients. Since the drying temperature can be selected specifically, the product is usually subjected to only moderate heat between 30 and 50 °C. No thermal damage occurs. So the method is especially suitable for processing heat-sensitive ingredients like enzymes, vitamins and flavourings.

**IDM:** And lastly: What, to your mind, is the mark of a good contract manufacturer?



**Mark Riemer, Commercial Director SternMaid: Contract manufacturing demands specialists who can offer an all-round service (photo: SternMaid)**

**MR:** Contract manufacturing demands specialists who can offer an all-round service. SternMaid has years of experience in the contract production of foods, food ingredients and food supplements in powder form. We can offer the whole service chain all from one source, from simple contract packaging to a full service including raw material purchasing, product development, quality assurance and delivery. The customer can choose between ordering the whole package or selecting individual service modules as required. Flexibility is extremely important too. It must be possible to meet even tight deadlines flexibly and on time, with no loss of quality. In this respect our large warehouse capacity is an advantage: we have plenty of space, and that enables us to respond to customers' wishes as the need arises. It quite often happens that containers from our customers arrive at our factory although their own customer, who is to process the goods further, has not yet called for them. That is no problem to us; we just make sure they are properly stored until needed.