



Driving concepts from vision through to reality



Food Management Today talks to Meller's managing director Colin Cox and associate director Rob Wallace.

Q: Can you offer an overview of Meller's work in the food industry and its key services?

Cox: Meller has been going for more than 25 years and we've had the privilege of working with multiple blue chip customers, including Cargill, Bakkavor and Nestle. We've also worked with many smaller companies and that's where we perhaps make the largest impact. Our key services are food and drink architectural design, project management, principal designer and cost control.

Q: Why should food manufacturers work with Meller rather than keeping a project in-house?

Cox: We understand that each customer is unique with individual requirements, our role is to help them deliver their projects effectively. Our in-house design and cost control services work very much hand-in-hand with each other to deliver the right solution on time and within budget.

Wallace: Our clients find it really is worth getting expert advice and control over their projects – from full management through to input in specific areas. For some of our customers we just provide certain sections of our services, we hold their hand to a point, before they go and complete the final part of that project. For others, we see everything through from start to finish. Whatever the requirement, we are more than happy to tailor our services to suit.

Q: Talk us through Meller's design services?

Cox: Our design is very specific and based around the client. As soon as we're appointed for any project we try to fully understand the customer's process, and how their business works. One difficulty clients have is that they know where they are at this point in time and they have a vision of the future, but how to get themselves from A to B is the sticking point. We provide the solution – that road map and ability to take them from where they are to where they want to be. Our solution might be a clever bit of design or procurement or a strategy of how we get them across to that point in the future.

Wallace: Using the right supply chain is also key to implementing the design and construction. We use people who are used to working in live production environments and understand how our clients want us to react.

Q: What are the main challenges food manufacturers encounter when designing a factory?

Wallace: There are various problems to solve at any point in time – from incoming utilities, product flows, waste flows, people flows, right through to project health and safety. We know how to react to a live production environment and understand that the client also has the challenge of maintaining their customers' demands and quality. Construction in a live process area is like small dance floor and everyone wants to be on it at the same time. That's where good planning, project management and cost control come to the fore.

Q: What makes a factory fit for 2019 and the future?

Cox: We're looking at how we can build more efficiently, how factories can be built quicker, how they can create less waste and how we use some of the waste that the customer produces to help generate energy. Looking forward at future factory designs, it is all about helping clients to not only deliver the project but also adding some value for them elsewhere.

Q: How does Meller help control project costs?

Wallace: It's about establishing the correct costs as the start of the project and getting the budget right, then continuously monitoring those costs throughout each phase of the project so that you come in on budget at the end. Spending in the right places is really dependent on the client's priorities. Some of our clients like to spend more money on the finishes within the building, while others will go for the standard food production finishes and prioritise funds elsewhere. It's about going back to that first stage of understanding their requirements and making sure that we fulfil them through our design.

Cox: Sometimes there are some hard discussions to have when it comes to making a vision a reality. The reality is that the client might not be able to afford exactly what they envisaged – but we can help them, sometimes it's about a compromise. A Rolls Royce and a Ford Focus both get you from A to B after all!



> Colin Cox.

Through our value engineering we can still provide the right design without too many compromises along the way.

Q: Can food businesses on a tight budget work with Meller?

Wallace: We offer the same service options whether it is for a one-man-band or a large multi-national. What we do is solve the problem and help them out the best we can. Some blue chip customers just want us to give them the focus on how they deliver their project and they go away and do it – but they just need that road map in place of how to get there. The relationships we build

with clients mean they come back to us time and time again, whether it is a case of us offering a little piece of advice here and there or delivering a project in its entirety.

Q: What advice would you give to a food business wanting to expand or relocate but doesn't know how to start?

Cox: We'd tell them that the perfect scenario for us is starting from scratch! We like get involved as early as possible, form a plan with them and iron out any problems from day one – prevention is better than cure.

Wallace: On the other hand, we do get customers who have already set off down a road and encountered issues. We're always happy to help rectify things, but working with us from the start really helps businesses to save time and money.

Q: Hygiene control is vital for food businesses How does Meller work around this?

Cox: It's about planning from day one and looking at how we can iron out risks. Construction and food production do not mix well but we can design a strategy with access routes, waste routes, changing facilities and cleaning regimes that work. Using the right people and systems to minimise and control the risks must be planned from day one – and it's second nature to us! **FMT**

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> Rob Wallace.