

Tamper-evident Shrink Banding Machine That Can Seal Any Shape or Size Container with One Size Plastic Film



Wayne Summerford
Founder and President
eatSafe, LLC

“People should pay attention to eatSafe because we have developed an exciting new technology that solves a thirty year old problem. We offer the most unique development in shrink packaging in at least fifteen years because of its ability to work in so many different industries and on so many different products. We are not going to rest with this accomplishment. We will continue our product development in order to meet the needs of a greater share of the packaging market.”
- Wayne Summerford

CEOCFO: Mr. Summerford, what is the concept behind eatSafe?

Mr. Summerford: We develop machinery that automatically places tamper-evident shrink bands on random-sized packages. Shrink bands are the clear plastic rings that typically seal containers and must be removed before opening the cover to access the product inside. The tamper-evident bands we produce are the safest seals available, and are typically found on food and drug products as well as on a variety of other goods. Their function is to prevent tampering with the product inside the container which is especially important for products that are ingested. Our machine is a totally new concept, never before has there been equipment that can easily seal any shape and most sizes of containers with one size of plastic film.

CEOCFO: Why do we need a different way of doing it? What is wrong with the present way?

Mr. Summerford: Our eatSafe Ringer machines appeal to manufacturers who want to seal larger-sized containers, since this has been an expensive and labor-intensive process until now. Currently, to place a tamper-evident seal on larger containers, manufacturers must

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purchase what is called a preformed shrink band, or “preform.” This is a tubular piece of material that is cut to the correct size to fit the container. The preform is then placed on a mold and partially shrunk so that it holds the container’s shape and will not slip off during the final shrinking process. Every container has a corresponding size of preform, and there are hundreds of shapes and sizes available. Preforms are usually made in China and shipped to the US where they must be applied to the product by hand. In order to maximize space during the shipping process, these preforms are nested together, which makes them difficult to separate for inventory and application. This is a costly and time consuming process, and we have developed a better way.

CEOCFO: *What have you developed at eatSafe?*

Mr. Summerford: Creating tamper-evident seals using the eatSafe Ringer is much more straightforward than using preforms. Place the container on the conveyor belt, and a custom seal is formed around it automatically. The container continues to a shrink station on the machine, and exits the machine ready for the store shelves. The eatSafe Ringer can seal containers ranging in width from 3”-16”, and 3”-24” in length. The Ringer offers great cost savings for manufacturers who are sealing large-sized containers, and also those who need to seal a variety of container shapes and sizes. The changeover time between sizes is short: less than one minute.

We have eliminated the need for preform shrink bands. Companies who package multiple products will no longer be obligated to have the corresponding preforms in stock. This equates to a great cost savings on both the direct labor to apply the preforms, but also on the indirect labor and costs associated with large minimum preform orders, long-range production forecasting, 16-week preform order lead times, inventory monitoring and purchasing, and maintaining warehouse space to store months of preform inventory.

CEOCFO: *Have people been looking for a better way or is it something that people just have not thought existed? What is the interest?*

Mr. Summerford: Preforms are a constant source of frustration for manufacturers. They are old technology, invented about thirty years ago and until now there has not been a machine that could accommodate a wide variety of container shapes and sizes without a time consuming changeover of parts and tubular shrink material. Also, the machinery currently on the market has a difficult time running larger packages. The eatSafe Ringer forms the seal on the fly as the package is running through the machine so we can run large and odd size/shape packages easily.

As labor rates continue to increase, packaging costs become a driver in increasing product prices. This motivates manufacturers to search for a better way to maintain product safety, and the response has been very positive for our equipment. The larger the product package is, the higher the savings realized after switching to the eatSafe Ringer. As I mentioned earlier, these savings are not only in direct labor costs, but also in indirect areas like forecasting, lead times, purchasing, warehousing and inventory. The inventory costs are not negligible; the roll stock shrink film contained on one standard 48”x40”x48” pallet can seal roughly the same number of containers as two semi-truckloads of preformed shrink bands. This is a huge savings of warehouse space.

CEOCFO: *Is the product in use? Are you still in development?*

Mr. Summerford: Our eatSafe Ringer is currently in use, and our clients love it. We continue to innovate the design to meet the needs of more types of manufacturers. Our Ringer 2 machine will offer more flexibility with a higher speed, and we are also developing a smaller-profile machine for additional different market segments. The response has been so great that our product development schedule may have to be accelerated.

CEOCFO: *How are you garnering attention?*

Mr. Summerford: We have just expanded our sales team with the addition of National Sales Representative Christopher Swaim. Chris has set up a network of manufacturer's representatives in the US who are working to help get the message out and grow the company's sales.

We currently focus on digital marketing, including developing press releases, a monthly blog, product videos, downloadable data sheets, social media content and a catalog of containers we have sealed. Also with the FDA's Food Safety Modernization Act taking effect, regulated industries will be focusing on preventing contamination and the eatSafe Ringer can be part of their solution.

CEOCFO: *Where do your customers purchase the shrink film roll stock to resupply the machine?*

Mr. Summerford: We supply any size or type of shrink film roll stock that our customers require, including custom widths. We are currently the only US vendor of the biodegradable shrink film called ecoSafe, made from biobased PLA. Companies who value being more environmentally-friendly can protect their products with ecoSafe film rather than the traditional PVC and PETG plastics.

CEOCFO: *Are you able to show the customers an ROI?*

Mr. Summerford: We can demonstrate an ROI of less than one year for nearly every customer. If they are currently using preform shrink bands on a larger container we can typically cut their material costs in half. Freight is another area where we offer great savings; customers are no longer having their preforms shipped from halfway around the world. By far the largest savings is realized in direct labor costs, because people no longer have to apply the seals by hand. Sometimes as many as four employees can be repurposed with the addition of one eatSafe Ringer.

The indirect savings are a little harder to quantify, but the savings can be substantial. Costs can be reduced for inventory and inventory control, purchasing activities, and long-range production forecasting. Inventory with preforms is all about having the items in stock when you might need them and with 16-week lead times and large minimum orders, this can be costly. With the eatSafe Ringer and films, customers can move to just-in-time ordering, and our minimum order is just two rolls of film.

CEOCFO: *Tell us about the difference between the two machines you currently offer?*

Mr. Summerford: Our flagship product, the eatSafe Ringer is designed for speeds of 30-35 packages per minute. We found that some of our customers are looking for more throughput but don't have the floor space to house two machines, so we are currently developing the Ringer 2 which will be able to seal over 60 packages per minute. The Ringer 2 is

in the final testing stages right now and will soon be available for purchase.

CEOCFO: *What is the lead time for your shrink films?*

Mr. Summerford: We have domestically produced PVC films, PETG films and our imported ecoSafe biodegradable film. We rely on our customers for film use projections so we can resupply them in a timely manner. We often ship film the same week the order is placed, as opposed to preform shrink bands which would take up to sixteen weeks for delivery from China.

CEOCFO: *What types of industries do you sell to?*

Mr. Summerford: When we initially brought the Ringer to market, we thought we would find the best traction in small food production plants such as bakeries. We are finding that the market is much larger than we originally anticipated, and includes diverse industries such as contract packaging, consumer goods, and pharmaceutical products. The broad appeal is because of the extreme flexibility of the machine. As I mentioned earlier, there is a great variety in the size of packages that can be sealed. The equipment can seal nearly any container shape, including common ones like round, oval and rectangular, but also seasonal holiday shapes like hearts, trees, elves and more. The Ringer runs shrink film as narrow as 1 1/2" and as wide as 10" which adds to its versatility. Contract packagers especially find the Ringer to be useful because they package a wide variety of products in a short span of time.

CEOCFO: *Are you looking for partnerships or investment funding as you start to roll out more and more?*

Mr. Summerford: We are not currently seeking any investment funding. Our plan is to sustain a rapid rate of growth by whatever means is necessary, including a mutually-beneficial partnership if the opportunity presents itself.

CEOCFO: *What surprised you throughout the process of development and getting started commercially?*

Mr. Summerford: What has surprised me is how versatile the machine is and how many industries are embracing it. When we began, our goal was just to replace preforms in the packaging process. The ROI is easy to show to food manufacturers who currently use preforms. We have been successful with food manufacturers, but we are also getting calls from people making Dixie cup-style products, seafood coolers, aluminum roasting pans and children's toys. The response is really so surprising because we did not anticipate it from those industries.

CEOCFO: *Why pay attention to eatSafe today?*

Mr. Summerford: People should pay attention to eatSafe because we have developed an exciting new technology that solves a thirty year old problem. We offer the most unique development in shrink packaging in at least fifteen years because of its ability to work in so many different industries and on so many different products. We are not going to rest with this accomplishment. We will continue our product development in order to meet the needs of a greater share of the packaging market.