Baxter Helps The Rodon Group Stay ‘Cheaper Than China’

When The Rodon Group, one of the largest family-owned and operated plastic injection molders in the United States, needed a cost-effective and efficient way to automate one of their packaging lines for sister company K’NEX line of children’s building toys, they turned to Rethink Robotics’ Baxter. Baxter’s ability to work directly next to Rodon employees without safety caging, along with its low price point, ease of use and unmatched flexibility, made it a perfect fit for the company – especially when considering its well-known commitment to keeping its manufacturing operations within the U.S. Rodon’s ‘Cheaper Than China’ mantra is a big part of its corporate positioning.

Baxter has been online at Rodon since February of 2013, reliably and efficiently packing parts for K’NEX’s Mario Kart Wii™ products. According to company president Michael Araten, Baxter has been able to pack parts tightly enough that the company believes it will be able to use 20 to 40 percent fewer boxes than usual for the task. It is performing so well that the company continues to expand the robot’s job responsibilities, from packing containers to helping inspect the finished parts once they come off the production line.

The reaction to its new robotic ‘employee’ – from Rodon’s production staff through its leadership team – has been extremely positive. “The fact that Baxter could work alongside human beings in a safe manner was huge,” said Tony Hofmann, Facility Manager at Rodon, who also appreciates the robot’s unique flexibility. “We work 24/7 here. Three shifts. To be able, midstream in a job, to stop, move him and reprogram him to do something else, again and again… I think that’s huge.”

Lowell Allen, Senior Vice President of Manufacturing, appreciates the ease of use that allows Baxter to be adopted quickly and easily among its production staff. “The learning experience we’ve seen with Baxter was a shock. They couldn’t believe how easy it is.”

When asked whether he or his colleagues on the plant floor were concerned about Baxter taking their jobs, Jason Miller, Vision & Automation Technician, sees the bigger picture of what Baxter represents. “The general sense is that nobody feels it’s threatening their jobs,” he says. “They think he’s really bringing jobs back for us. There are several jobs that might be in China if not for a technology like Baxter.”

To hear the full story of Baxter @ work at The Rodon Group, watch the full video on our YouTube channel, youtube.com/rethinkrobotics. To learn more about Baxter, visit rethinkrobotics.com.
What makes Baxter different?

Baxter is a groundbreaking solution for manufacturers of all sizes. In addition to its uniquely low price point, Baxter offers six fundamental differences that distinguish it from traditional industrial robots.

1. **No programming.** Line workers can train Baxter in minutes, with no expertise in software, robotics or engineering required. In addition, Baxter re-trains quickly for fast line changeovers.

2. **No safety cages.** Baxter was designed with a comprehensive safety system which makes it feasible for working without barriers and in close proximity to people in a production environment.

3. **Streamlined integration.** Baxter is a complete system (hardware, software, controls, UI, safety, sensors) that can quickly and easily be set up, integrated and trained to do its first task.

4. **Works intelligently.** Baxter is designed and programmed to perform a wide range of manufacturing and production tasks; it is aware of its environment, and automatically adjusts to changes.

5. **Versatile and capable.** Baxter was designed to perform simple, repetitive tasks quickly and efficiently, freeing people to focus on higher-level, more value-added activities.

6. **Extensible platform.** Baxter is a complete, yet fully extensible platform which includes all necessary software, with updates provided regularly to enhance capabilities and performance.