

Agio Cigars on a Roll with TS3



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*-- René Janssen ,
Technical Purchasing
Manager*

"The cigar is something that demands respect. It is to be enjoyed fully by all the senses, the nose, the palate, the finger, the eye . . . Every good cigar harbors an exquisite experience."

Agio Cigars, the leading cigar manufacturer in Western Europe, refers to this quote from the *Connoisseurs' Book of the Cigars* on the company website. The statement seems to capture a sense of the company's dedication to mass producing the highest quality cigar possible with the same care they would give to hand rolling them one at a time.

Almost 100 years old, Agio offers brands such as Panter, Balmoral, De Huifkar, and their signature brand Agio. They now have six locations throughout Europe, Asia and South America. When they began planning for their newest facility in Westerlo, Belgium, they wanted state-of-the-art sorting equipment to ensure product quality and maximize production. And that's when they found the [Tobacco Sorter™3 \(TS3\)](#) from Key Technology's SRC Division.

The company was no stranger to optical sorting, reports René Janssen, technical purchasing manager. "Our equipment was modern till now but it wasn't enough any more. It was from a former technical generation. We wanted to do full-color inspection and wanted to do it faster.

So Janssen and others involved in equipment purchasing decisions were formed into teams, each responsible for researching a different inspection alternative. They talked to other companies who were using different types of inspection systems and after a visit from an SRC (which was bought by Key Technology in 2000) representative, they decided to try out the TS3.

"This was an important investment, especially in cigars, and, of course, for a private company," Janssen points out. "In cigarettes, it would be nothing, but in cigars, it was. We needed a solid firm with technical and service backup, and we wanted a machine that had been proven in tobacco production. SRC had (several) machines running in the tobacco industry which was a good sign for us."

The Tobacco Sorter 3 removes foreign materials from stripped tobacco and stem with unprecedented speed, precision, and connectivity, helping processors achieve high purity standards, reduce overhead, and limit product liability. Available in three models – small 240, medium 480 and large 720, the gentle, high-volume system sorts up to 9,000 kilograms of tobacco an hour.

Agio first did some tests at SRC's location in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, which is near their facility in Duizel, Holland. After successful results, Agio tested the TS3 in

production at their Duizel plant to ensure that all of the troubleshooting was done before the machine was purchased.

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After the successful test in Duizel, Agio purchased the TS3 and moved it to the new plant in Westerlo. The TS3 was upgraded with a new camera and software capable of detecting over 2 million colors. The inspection system performs consistently and sets industry standards for good-product retention and non-tobacco rejection detecting metals, plastics, paper, black rubber, cellophane, string, and foreign organic material.

Agio generously opened its doors so other tobacco manufacturers could see the TS3 in action. According to Janssen, the machine seems to sell itself. “Several people have visited us and are very interested in the machine. It is impressive.”

As the new plant puts more production time on its books, Janssen is glad to have Key’s service technicians nearby. “SRC was doing very well and now Key adds lots of support. We have service only a few hours away and they do some good things to help us. They can always put their finger on a solution.”

