

Case Study
gategroup / Zurich, Switzerland



gategroup. Airline catering around the globe.



High altitude flights for the palate.



gategroup is the global leader in airline catering and retail-on-board. Headquartered in Zurich, Switzerland, it has production kitchens around the globe from Atlanta to Hong Kong and Paris. Each of these commissaries strives to satisfy the airlines' needs: for example, preparing beef stroganoff and a dessert, to soup spoons to daily newspapers. The collaboration between caterer and customer begins with the understanding of the airline: what is their concept? Which service elements do they require? What is the budget? Which cultures or cuisines does the airline represent, and ultimately serve? The resulting catering program is designed based on this vision, in consideration of culinary trends, new technologies, and quality ingredients.

Where do the delicious ideas come from?

The high standards of gategroup are undeniably present in the test kitchen: the domain of Executive Development Chef, Dennis Puchert, whose craft is to apply his culinary expertise when presenting ideas to customers, developing new products, and improving recipes. Each customer presents a different set of needs and expectations – some contribute their own recipes, which simply need to be adapted to flight requirements. Others provide some direction and leave the creative process to chefs such as Puchert. It takes an average of 4–6 months until a menu becomes worthy for skies. To maintain the high quality of the results on a larger scale, the test kitchen is built in exactly the same way as the production kitchen: with the RATIONAL SelfCookingCenter® as its focal point.

The company gategroup caters for more than 500 million passengers annually and thus takes first place in the global market for in-flight catering. The meals are produced at over 200 locations in more than 60 countries on all continents. The company has around 43,000 employees, with headquarters based in Zurich.



Mr. Fischer, how do you do it?



Oliver Fischer, Director Group Culinary Excellence, has been at gategroup since 2004 and is responsible for standardisation and the introduction of ConnectedCooking in the gategroup kitchens. In Zurich alone, his 1,000-strong team handles between 2 and 3 tonnes of fresh food daily. Over 60,000 meals leave the kitchens in in-flight trolleys bound for flights every day.

Mr. Fischer, what challenges do you face on a daily basis, and how do you overcome them?

The industry and passengers embrace experimentation. So increasingly we see more special requests, and the diversification of meals on each plane is increasing. Asian, vegetarian, vegan, halal, kosher, dietetic, lactose and gluten-free, child-friendly – a new variant might well be added tomorrow! For many customers, we therefore develop a basic menu with variable components. The standardisation of processes helps us with this: menu elements can quickly be recomposed without compromising the quality. Despite this diversification, standardisation ensures efficient processes, minimal cost pressure and the highest quality.

The cost pressure on airlines is increasing every year. How do you deal with this?

You could save on products, but this does not work: what do you think would happen on a plane if someone's neighbour supposedly has the better meal on their tray? Rather, we must choose technical methods that achieve two things: an improvement of the work environment and processes and the improvement of quality. Otherwise we just become cheaper, when our actual standard is instead to become better.

Can you give us an example?

In our large kitchens, the work processes are very organised: everyone has their place and knows what they have to do. We use the “cook and chill” method in production and our kitchens are built to accommodate this. The RATIONAL combi-steamers are arranged in a row with the corresponding number of chilling units stand on the opposite side. With such short paths, we can execute around 210 recipes daily.

What does the future look like for the kitchen?

It is definitely digital. In our view, ConnectedCooking, the networking solution by RATIONAL, has already made a good start. Our combi-steamers and VarioCookingCenter® units are already networked. We are also working with RATIONAL to further develop the system in accordance with our needs.



In order to standardise menus, example dishes are plated up.

Customised production kitchens around the world.



The chefs at gategroup quickly saw that tilting fryers and boiling pans have become obsolete and that cooking in the 21st century is no longer done horizontally but vertically. Efficient processes have paved the way so that gategroup and RATIONAL can easily examine work and production processes carefully and pinpoint concepts for further training. The result was customised commercial kitchens with SelfCookingCenter® and VarioCookingCenter® units all around the world. gategroup's standardised procedures helped achieve this, because everything is made according to the same principle. This means that once defined, process can be displayed on RATIONAL units and transferred to as many units as required using ConnectedCooking. This guarantees a consistently high standard all over the world.



A RATIONAL unit at every location.

gategroup's first RATIONAL unit was installed at Hamburg airport in 2008. Now there are close to 400 units of different sizes worldwide, ranging from the small SelfCookingCenter® XS to the SelfCookingCenter® 202. In Europe, the portfolio includes the VarioCookingCenter® – also in a range of sizes. Some SelfCookingCenter® and VarioCookingCenter® units are connected to each other with ConnectedCooking which ensures standardisation and knowledge transfer around the world.

Standardisation in production is essential for everyone on the plane to receive the same quality meal.

Zurich site

7 × SelfCookingCenter®
2 × VarioCookingCenter®



Hygiene is everything – including in airline catering.



Pureed or liquid products can also be prepared sous-vide.

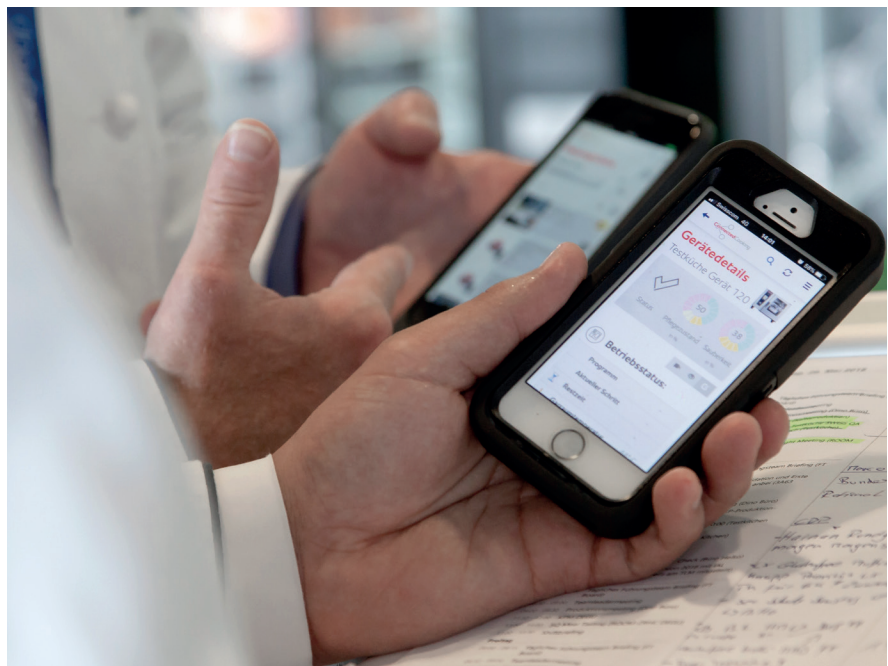
What is immediately apparent is that in terms of packaging, recipes and food deliveries, yellow is the colour of the day. The reason for this is that all raw materials and foods are marked a different colour each day so that the day of production can be recognised immediately. There are also standard measures such as the separate processing of salad, fish, meat and poultry, making chemical processing unnecessary. Cooking processes are also an important part of hygiene: over 90% of foods are produced using the “cook and chill” method. At the same time, production procedures are controlled: this is supported by the automatic documentation and logging of HACCP data in the SelfCookingCenter® and VarioCookingCenter®, and with ConnectedCooking the data can also be edited and printed at the push of a button.

Global network.

gategroup believes that without digital networking, standardisation would not be possible. For the airline caterer, the benefit is that global knowledge can be shared with other colleagues with minimal effort. Oliver Fischer puts it in a nutshell: “We need digitisation.” And he uses ConnectedCooking, RATIONAL's networking solution extensively: first, he drafts the menu plans, writes the recipes and saves these with the right pictures from the test kitchen in ConnectedCooking. Once everything is ready, Mr. Fischer sends these recipes around the globe in the relevant language. This gives him control over the quality and saves a great deal of time.

“With ConnectedCooking, I can see the SelfCookingCenter® in Atlanta and in Barcelona. Recipes and processes can be transferred in seconds.”

Oliver Fischer, Director Group Culinary Excellence.



RATIONAL as a partner and service provider.

gategroup only works with partners who offer creative tailored solutions beyond the simple purchase of a product. For hot food preparation, they found such a partner in RATIONAL, because the company is familiar with kitchen processes and transfers this knowledge. Global training is developed together and rolled out to share product innovations and menu developments. User training is provided locally in order to convey the necessary knowledge to every workplace. In the technical department too, Oliver Fischer relies on the RATIONAL international service package in order to minimise downtime and extend the life time of the heavily-used units through regular maintenance.

“With the service package from RATIONAL, we ensure that the performance of the units is improved and that they are always ready to go.”

Oliver Fischer, Director Group Culinary Excellence, gategroup.



With the mobile oven rack, the finished products are quickly sent from the SelfCookingCenter® to the cooling units.



On the safe side: Cook & Chill

Cook & Chill is a preparation method that was developed in the USA in the 1960s, and since then it has become increasingly popular, particularly in industry catering. In this procedure the hot food components are prepared and cooked as usual, however the finished dishes are then chilled to below 4 °C within 90 minutes. This prevents the multiplication of pathogenic germs and the formation of toxins because the hygienically unsafe temperature range (approx. 40 to 10 °C) is quickly crossed. In a closed cool chain, the foods can be stored for up to four days without any loss of quality and without any limitation to the hygienic safety. Before serving, the dishes are heated, or regenerated to use the technical term.

**For more information on our catering solutions,
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