



‘Speed Scratch’ as Business Builder

With quality and consistency, convenience-added products can expand your brand—profitably

By **Mark Kwasigroch**,
Kendall College School of Culinary Arts

Your mission: Make a batch of turnovers that are light, buttery and flaky. Do you:

▶ Commit to a multistep process that includes preparing a base dough with bread flour and all-purpose flour, enclose butter at exactly the right temperature, chill rolled-out dough before rolling out again, and again. Then cut, fill, fold and

bake—consuming literally hours for perfect turnovers. Or:

▶ Lay out ready-to-use puff-pastry dough, cut into squares or circles, fill to make sweet or savory, crimp and bake for beautifully golden, fresh-from-the-oven turnovers in minutes.

If you chose the first method, many a traditional baker from days of yore

would be proud. But today, more American bake shops seek shortcut solutions to creating high-quality classic pastries, breads and other baked goods.

Quality Convenience

This should come as no surprise. The phrase “from scratch” entered the English lexicon as recently as the 1950s—the



Put Your Signature on It

Whether you offer goods made from scratch or with the help of convenience-added products, your goal is satisfied customers who become repeat customers. Work with your produce, deli and prepared-foods departments to make use of leftover products to create new, signature items.

► Thin muffin batter to create waffles or pancakes, and add fruit and/or nuts to the batter. Pancakes can be rolled and filled with spreadable cheese, fruit fillings, chocolate chips, etc., for easy grab-and-go treats. Waffles can be layered with filling, stacked and quartered for sweet or savory handheld waffles on the run. Use overripe fruit to improve food costs.

► Roll out thawed bread dough to squares and fill with leftover stew or chili, lunch meats and/or cheeses, then proof and bake for a delectable hot sandwich.

► Customize breads by thawing and shaping frozen dough, then kneading in ingredients such as nuts, spices, fresh or dried herbs, cheeses or dried fruits, then proof and bake.

► Take flash-frozen, par-baked dough, egg-wash it, then sprinkle with colorful seeds before baking for a visually appealing loaf.

same decade that saw the first electric can opener. In an industry beleaguered by excruciatingly short profit margins and a dearth of qualified help, “speed scratch,” or the use of convenience products to eliminate time and labor in food preparation, makes a lot of sense.

These days, “convenience added” has largely replaced the term “speed scratch,” but the concept is the same: enlisting convenience food products in everything from components of more complicated dishes to simply thawing or heating and serving. What’s changed from 1993 when the term “speed scratch” was coined by a Springfield, Mo.-based public relations

firm is chefs’ and bakers’ acceptance of using convenience products to get the job done. While nary a baker worth his or her salt would admit to cutting corners 20 years ago, the realities of the marketplace have made convenience products in professional bake shops not only acceptable, but necessary.

The clincher is quality. Consider a croissant. A handful of respected manufacturers offer freezer-to-oven croissants that, while pricey, require absolutely no labor. But assuming some steps of production, while eliminating others, can allow your operation that “from scratch” reputation without all the work and for less cost.

For instance, although puff-pastry dough does not contain yeast, the water in the dough creates steam, which aids rising in the oven and creates some of the airiness of croissants. And premium convenience puff pastry made with high-butterfat butter rather than margarine yields a desired mouth feel and flavor experience that customers crave.



One Base, Many Products

But don't stop there. With the bulk of the work already done, in-store staff has the time and opportunity to take that turnover or croissant to the next level, creating value-added items warranting a higher price that customers are willing to pay and, thus, yielding greater profit. And with a

good-quality puff pastry, croissants and turnovers are just the beginning. From that single product comes a host of other goods such as cream horns, palmiers, allumettes and galettes, as well as sweet and savory bouchées, napoleons and strudels.

If cutting time and labor wasn't enough, keep in mind that one product

with many uses greatly facilitates your inventory control, saving space and reducing SKUs.

Admittedly, I was one of those classically trained bakers who spurned the thought of "speed scratch" baking, treating the idea like a four-letter word. When I worked for high-end hotels and bake shops and later owned my own bakery north of Chicago, it was scratch or nothing. And I put in many long hours every day for many years.

But when I sold The Winnetka Pâtisserie and joined Dawn Food Products, suddenly I was marketing convenience solutions—bread mixes and bases, puff dough, scone and muffin mixes and even ready-to-ice cakes—to bakers just like me.

Granted, little equals scratch. But scratch simply is not practical or reason-

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able in most operations that want to turn a profit in today’s environment. In my role at Kendall College in Chicago, I discuss “real world” bake-shop situations with my students as a matter of course, and I build working with convenience-added items into the curriculum. The objective is to fill holes on shelves—and to keep filling them, meaning items are selling.

A good example is a 30-pound cake base that can be transformed into loaf cakes, ring cakes and muffins. Pour whole eggs into a mixing bowl and add base, a flavor extract or emulsion and poppy seeds. Blend and cream, gradually add oil and water, then blend again. Fill 1-pound loaf pans, 8-inch ring pans and/or muffin tins and bake to golden brown. Top with a premade (or scratch) streusel and/or sliced or slivered nuts, and *voilà*: three different baked goods, easy as pie, as they say—and nearly from scratch.

Why make your own pizza dough when precut, presheeted round and square dough is available in a huge range of sizes and wheat varieties? Make any pizza dough “better for you” by sprinkling on cooked whole grains such as white, red or black quinoa (which also contributes quality protein). Thaw, proof, dock, top (or fill and roll) with any number of ingredients, and bake. Think calzones and other pocket sandwiches, as well as focaccia topped with grilled vegetables and an umami-rich cheese, and that pizza dough does double or even triple duty.

Are you known for your from-scratch breads? Then devote your energy and focus to them. Meanwhile, many excellent cake bases and mixes are so easy to prepare that the least-skilled staff can help expand your menu with consistent-quality cakes. Indeed, the primary factor in choosing any convenience-added product is quality. If it tastes as consistently good as it would from scratch, with the desired appearance and mouth feel, then you’ve found a superb product for meeting your operational goals.

From cookies to scones, from pie shells to Danishes, there’s a quality convenience-added product to meet every modern foodservice need. The amount of “from scratch” you incorporate has everything to do with your labor, facility and profit goals. Experiment with the products available, and select those that best build on your operation’s hard-earned brand. ■

Mark Kwasigroch is a baking and pastry chef instructor at Kendall College School of Culinary Arts, Chicago.