

Data al dente

Pasta manufacturer reduces database management and information request time on average by 50 percent with help from PSC Group.

To say that Jayne Hoover knows pasta is a bit of an understatement. From lesser-known shapes like acini di pepe (tiny beads) to perennial world favorite, ziti, Hoover and her team support the production of over 2 million pounds of pasta per day at American Italian Pasta Company (AIPC.)

As vice president of quality, research and development for AIPC, Hoover and her colleagues must account for the high quality production of every noodle. With private label customers and numerous brands worldwide, AIPC has dozens of product and customer-specific variables to track - ingredients, formulas, product and package specifications, certifications, and quality documents - just to name a few.

Historically, this product and customer data had been maintained in different areas throughout the company, in a variety of spreadsheets and databases. Hoover knew there had to be a more scalable and efficient way.

“Finding good information fast was a real challenge,” she said. “With information in so many different places, we would spend a lot of time finding and extracting what we needed and then, in some cases, reformatting it for readability and reporting,” said Hoover. “Regulatory and consumer affairs also require regular audits and reporting and, at the time, those were time consuming to pull together.”

Hoover first started to make the case for more cohesive data systems when she first arrived at AIPC eight years

ago. Her early independent research turned up numerous product lifecycle management tools and systems. It was difficult to distinguish one from the other and vendors galore lined up to show their wares.

A Better Way

The PSC team listened carefully as she described her vision and requirements for a master database system. Right from the beginning, she liked PSC’s approach. PSC wouldn’t make any recommendations without first studying the situation and enterprise needs.

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— Jayne Hoover, Vice President of Quality and R&D,
American Italian Pasta Company

“We have everyone from sales to marketing, to finance and quality using the system and the efficiencies as a result are tremendous for productivity. The value of the system goes up with each internal group that comes on board.”

– Jeremy Vance, Director of Technology Infrastructure,
American Italian Pasta Company

“The PSC team came in and interviewed people to understand what their needs were and why,” Hoover said. “They didn’t assume anything. I can’t say enough good things about PSC for that.”

PSC set out to help AIPC manage customer complaints, formulations, specifications and customer quality documentation in less time, with less labor and in a way that no longer was a drain on productivity. AIPC chose a centralized web-based framework to organize and track the long list of variables and their relational values.

PSC developers converted information once stored in spreadsheets, PDFs and Word documents into a complete and connected solution, easily accessible by anyone in the company, with the proper credentials.

Before the new system was in place, Hoover said that getting the correct and updated information would sometimes take days. Reports, snapshots and answers are now available in minutes.

“Now there’s no more laborious digging for essential data elements. It’s so user-friendly, we now have other departments asking for access to the system,” said Hoover.

IT Upside

With IT systems and connectivity issues spanning the country and the world, Jeremy Vance and his team have also played a critical role in successfully executing the new master database plan. As director of technology infrastructure at AIPC, Vance has had to ensure that Internet connectivity, servers and network security

were prepared for the required database conversions and upgrades.

New to the company in the last two years, Vance joined the project in time to see just enough of the old ways, and also play an important part in designing the new and improved system. He points to the value being in the number of key groups using the system.

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Vance points to a very specific departmental productivity enhancements:

Quality/R&D Specifications Management

- 60% reduction in product information requests
- From 11 hours to just under two hours for spec change-over requests

Marketing – Customer Complaints

- 40% reduction in time spent managing data
- Increase in support activities for analysis & research

IT and Infrastructure - Customer Performance

- Enable a consistent single point of view for all KPIs across multiple levels
- Eliminate four hours of report preparation per customer per week

AIPC and PSC aren’t stopping there. Plans for adding onto the system are underway and greater efficiencies are yet to be realized. There is no time for resting on laurels when serving private label customers around the world.

Hoover and Vance are happy with the progress the whole company has made. Sitting back in her chair to gaze out her office window, Hoover searches for the right way to describe another unexpected benefit of the herculean project.

“Not only does it help us better serve our customers, it makes our people more productive and happier,” said Hoover. ●

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