

CHEF SOLUTIONS – RF ENABLED TRANSACTIONS REDUCE LABOR EXPENSES AND INVENTORY LEVELS

CASE STUDY

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Chef Solutions, Inc. manufactures and distributes prepared foods and bakery products to the retail and foodservice industries in North America. Its products include dips and spreads, prepared seafood salads, croissants, cookies and puff pastry, as well as refrigerated salads, mashed potatoes, side dishes, fresh-cut fruits and desserts. The company was founded in 1999 and is based in Wheeling, Illinois. As of November 21, 2011, Chef Solutions, Inc. operates as a subsidiary of Reser's Fine Foods, Inc.

BUSINESS CHALLENGE

While the product mix is a successful one for Chef Solutions, the company had to work to get the right information systems mix when it sought to combine six companies into one. It needed one robust solution that could track its various items, from raw materials to finished goods, which often traveled through several divisions before reaching their final destination. With the wide assortment of product offerings, it also needed a labeling solution that could easily grab the precise information needed from a centralized system to print labels whenever and wherever they were required.

When Chef Solutions brought six companies – Orval Kent, I&K, Ozark Salad Company, Landau Foods, Pennant Foods and La Francaise Bakery – under one banner, company executives knew the way to provide the best service possible and attain consistency in operations was to install a feature-rich enterprise resource planning (ERP) system that provided real-time data for the entire conglomerate of 11 facilities nationwide.



INDUSTRY:

Manufacturing/Food

BUSINESS CHALLENGE:

- Goods tracking across six companies
- Precise good identification
- Printing mobility

SOLUTION:

Barcode label printing

KEY BENEFITS:

- High-level accuracy
- Real-time data
- Near-elimination of key entry

ADDITIONAL KEY BENEFITS:

- Productivity rise
- Seamless data collection

THE SOLUTION

Chef Solutions decided to implement an SAP solution. When the company stated it wanted to include the ability to print directly from SAP – not an easy task – Chef Solutions IT personnel turned to Peak Technologies to integrate barcoding with its enterprise applications. Jackie Weber, Peak’s strategic account executive for SAP in the Central and Northeast regions, heard what was needed and contacted Zebra Technologies.

According to Weber, the old labeling systems consisted of stand-alone printers that applied labels to boxes. “There was no integration. The systems couldn’t talk to each other,” she said. “Chef Solutions needed information that resided in SAP – including part numbers and batch numbers – on the labels, and this information needed to be consistent across all of their locations.” With those goals in mind, Weber said, “We started asking a lot of questions about where and what Chef Solutions wanted to print, some of which may have surprised them. People think that you can just plug in a printer and start printing, and that’s not the case. Printing out of SAP isn’t easy.”

SERVING UP SOLUTIONS

When the food preparer realized the project was more complicated than it originally thought, it brought Peak deeper into the project. The integrator became the solutions provider, consulting on the SAP printing side and performing visits to all Chef Solutions’ sites to determine where the company needed to print documents and labels, as well as providing the hardware, software, cabling, media, installation, training and maintenance for the application. Given the complex nature of the multi-facility application, site visits were essential. Surveyors thoroughly analyzed the needs at each facility, getting to know the ebb and flow of the work. They discovered, for example, that there was a lot of internal movement within the facilities and among facilities. They also took stock of everything currently in place that might be usable with the new application.

Weber had used Zebra Technologies products in SAP solutions like this before, and knew it was the right choice here as well. “The client wanted to be able to control the label formats from a centralized location using a WYSIWYG (what-you-see-is-what-you-get) tool, and still be able to grab variable information from SAP and develop that into labels,” she said. “Zebra’s BAR-ONE for mySAP Business Suite label format software allows you to create a WYSIWYG label design and then bring in the information from SAP.” After careful analysis, and a pilot project at Chef Solutions’ corporate headquarters in Schaumburg, Ill., Peak began site evaluations that would allow it to make proper recommendations for equipment and label material. Peak also began the creation of the printer cable infrastructure, followed by the installation of Zebra printers – more than 60 overall. The goal: to have the facilities brought online in three one-month phases.

SIXTY PRINTERS, ONE POWERFUL SYSTEM

The new network uses approximately 60 Zebra printers throughout the facilities for receipt of raw materials and labeling during production and shipping – all capable of accepting commands from the SAP system. Most of Chef Solutions’ operations use Zebra’s all-metal direct thermal or thermal transfer industrial printers to create 4- by 6-inch paper labels. Facilities with automated print-and-apply operations use Zebra PAX print engines. The PAX engines share the same ZPL II printer control language as the industrial printers, enabling the company to combine different printer models without additional programming. The initial transaction of notifying the system when raw material is received triggers the printing of the label that holds a material number (part number, description, batch number, expiration date and bar code). When material is put away or otherwise moved, the transaction is noted by scanning the label.

Raw materials are picked for production when a work order is generated by the SAP system. The labels are scanned to record dispatch, and the

materials are sent to production. The finished goods are produced from those raw materials and, when they are received from production, a new label is printed containing the same information.

A Peak technician set up the barcode labeling software for mySAP Business Suite software, trained Chef Solutions' workers how to use the software tool and set up the tables that allowed Chef Solutions to map the bar codes, text and graphic fields to SAP database fields and system variables.

"This is not plug and play," said Weber of the SAP interface. "But it's a neat little tool, and it works really well."

BENEFITS AND RESULTS

With its centralized system in place, Chef Solutions is realizing benefits from high-level accuracy with up-to-the-minute data information to near-elimination of key entry. Some facilities use wireless terminals to record movements. Some use print and apply systems. It all works together seamlessly to keep the lines and the products moving, and to keep everyone in the loop.



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