Case Study

Pocono ProFoods

Distributing quality product data for a quality customer experience

Challenge

Pocono ProFoods' eight-person purchasing department spent significant time each day handling inquiries from sales representatives, customers and in-field buyers, requesting information about its vast portfolio of products. As demands for information grew, the mid-sized distributor decided to create a data management system comprised of complete, supplier-provided product data for efficient access by all.

Solution

The company launched an initiative that required suppliers to publish their product information via data pools and the Global Data Synchronization Network™ (GDSN®). Taking a step-by-step approach, the team implemented a campaign to collaborate with suppliers in publishing accurate and comprehensive product data, and then provided sales reps and their customers with online access to this information.

Benefits

- Reduced the number of calls by 90 percent from sales reps to purchasing, saving significant time and associated costs.

- Enables faster sales cycles by providing information for faster decision-making by customers.

- Drives demand for suppliers' products based on accurate and accessible data.

- Fosters positive collaboration with customers and suppliers.

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Kevin Ahnert
COO
Pocono ProFoods

In 1940, Edward Driebe started a wholesale produce business that would expand and develop to become Pocono ProFoods, a distributor of quality food products and equipment with over 225 employees. Today, Pocono ProFoods continues to be family-owned and managed, continuously evolving to better serve restaurants and other foodservice operators throughout 15 New England and Mid-Atlantic states.

"Embracing technology has long been a part of our culture," says Kevin Ahnert, COO and part of the company's third generation. "Automating the delivery of complete and accurate product data with technology and GS1 Standards has been a critical initiative for us since 2014. The ability to provide this quality product data is a necessity in today's food distribution industry."

Launching the company's initiative, Ahnert and Kevin Cramer, vice president of Procurement, devised a plan, taking a methodical, step-by-step approach. "We had a straightforward goal in mind," says Cramer. "And that was to reduce the number of calls requesting needed product information."

Ahnert adds, "With accurate and complete product data at our fingertips—direct from suppliers—we knew the benefits would be significant for our customers, our sales reps, our purchasing department and even our suppliers."

The initiative centered on suppliers publishing their product data—specifically each product's Global Trade Item Number® (GTIN®) and attributes like nutritional information—in data pools for sharing via the GDSN. Pocono ProFoods worked with 1WorldSync, the leading multi-enterprise product information network, to synchronize its data pool of suppliers' published product information with the company's data management system.

Step One focused on gaining buy-in from suppliers to start the process, and then taking action to confirm the accuracy of their data. "We verified that each supplier's Global Location Number (GLN) along with their GTINs 'matched' what we had in our system," explains Cramer. "We discovered that about 25 percent of our suppliers were already publishing product data in a data pool and GDSN. For the majority of our suppliers we spent significant time sharing information and educating them about how we were changing the way we do business. We communicated via letters, meetings, industry conferences—a cadence of communications about our data publication requirements and the benefits for them, our suppliers."

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Kevin Cramer
Vice President of Procurement, Pocono ProFoods

During Step Two, sales reps and customers alike were given access to the published product information. Now, they simply click on each product's icon via the company's online catalog to look up available product information online such as nutritional data, a PDF including the product's data and even an image.

To date, 75 percent of products carried by Pocono ProFoods are being published in data pools and downloaded to the company's data management system for use by its sales reps, the purchasing department and customers.

"Suppliers quickly realized the value of providing complete and accurate product data," says Ahnert. "We have up to 100 percent of our sales force using the product data via laptops to help make sales every day. With information at their fingertips, they can answer customers' questions to close sales much quicker. It's an exciting value proposition for everyone."

The team's original goal to reduce the number of incoming inquiries has also been achieved. "Internal calls from sales reps to purchasing alone have declined by approximately 90 percent since it's now easier for them to access and use information," says Cramer. "There's no doubt: We're much more efficient and saving significant time when it comes to delivering the accurate product information needed to make informed buying decisions."

Pocono ProFoods has lost no time to complete its plan. Step Three is now underway to leverage this supplier-provided product data even further throughout the company's operations and transportation processes. "With standardized and quality data, we intend to take advantage of the many opportunities to increase efficiencies and serve our new generation of customers even better," says Ahnert.

To learn more about Pocono ProFoods, visit www.poconoprofoods.com.

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