Company Name
House-Autry Mills

Bill Pashka
Director - Operations

Location
Newton, North Carolina

Industry
Dry-Mix Food

Employees
60

Goals
- Improve inventory accuracy
- Troubleshoot issues in real-time
- Improve raw materials planning
- Reduce waste

Solutions
- ERP software including accounting

Results
- Increased inventory accuracy
- Reduced material costs
- Improved vendor performance
- Increased profitability
- Immediate savings

"We set ourselves aside by delivering product to kitchens "Just in Time." On-time delivery of product allows our customers to keep lean inventory."

BatchMaster Meets the Need of Multi-Model Organizations

House-Autry Mills is a recognized market leader in the dry mix food-manufacturing industry. Their products include everything from simple corn meal and spice blends to baked goods recipes. Their products can be found on the shelves of Food Lion and Wal-Mart, as well as on the menus of restaurants like the Cracker Barrel and upscale seafood houses throughout the country.

In 1812 the House family relocated from England to Newton Grove, North Carolina where their original mill was built. Their original Water-powered milling wheels were transported to North Carolina by boat and over land from England over 188 years ago. Over the years House's Mill continued to expand, eventually merging in 1967 with the Autry Brothers Mill Co. to form what is today known as House-Autry Mills.

Quality continues to remain the company's number-one priority. House-Autry uses the freshest ingredients to make their products. Every batch of product is tested and approved by their Quality Assurance team. Meanwhile, their Research & Development team continues to add new items to serve their consumers ever changing needs.

House-Autry's retail product line is available at neighborhood grocery stores in 23 states throughout the Southeast, Northeast and Mid Atlantic regions. This product line comes in several sizes and varieties in order to accommodate the ever-changing needs of the customer.

The company also relies heavily upon a food service model, which according to their Director of Operations Bill Pashka ..."operates as the inventory location for many food service customers. We set ourselves aside by delivering product to kitchens "Just in Time." On-time delivery of product allows our customers to keep lean inventory."

House-Autry Mills recently made a significant investment and commitment to future growth at their facility, which provides consumers with the continued quality products customers have come to expect over the years.

Time for a New System

Though corn meal was their number one product line for many years, the company later expanded their business to include a line of quality breaders and mixes. Pashka commented, "A growing product catalog provided the company with a number of unique opportunities to expand the business model."

Like many food manufacturers, the merger of companies, expansion of capabilities, and increase of private-label, make-to-order and toll manufacturing requests presented unique challenges. These new dynamics provided an opportunity for increased profits. They also introduced challenges with wasted materials and opportunities for process improvements.

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Many of these issues were the impetus for House-Autry to hire a Process Control Manager. This individual's role would be to evaluate practices and help streamline the organization.

House-Autry faced other significant challenges relating to their existing system. Because many of the calculations made in their processes were spreadsheet based, the company had written a number of macros (sequence of computing instructions) to easily tally important data.

In one example, Pashka detailed how simple mistakes could cost the company days of productivity. "Every once in a while, someone would hit the button to calculate Tuesday's manufacturing data. The only problem was, they meant to hit the button to tally up the Thursday data. That meant that not only did someone have to find the error, but then we'd have to wipe out the bad data, then tie up several days' worth of man-hours re-entering the data all the way back to Tuesday. We needed a system that would force accuracy and eliminate the opportunity for manual error."

Mixing it Up

Bill Pashka is a veteran of the information technology industry. With years of experience in both manufacturing and the IT systems, he had no delusions about the effort required to implement a new system, nor the challenges of introducing technology to a workforce that was used to paper and spreadsheet-based practices.

"We have many employees with fifteen years or more of experience," says Pashka. "I knew that any software acquisition would be a challenge. BatchMaster's consulting team, however, did an excellent job of listening to our requirements and configuring the system to do exactly what we wanted."

House-Autry also knew that they had issues with receiving. Like many companies using paper-based processes, it's impossible to know exactly what the rest of the organization is thinking and doing. Without systems in place, receiving is simply that: a group of individuals tasked with receipt. When a buyer inquires about a vendor's available inventory, and then decides to buy elsewhere, the individuals manning the receiving dock don't know the difference. A similar problem arises when the same receivers see incoming shipments with back-ordered line items or more product than was ordered.

BatchMaster gives the system administrators and managers the ability to decide on their tolerance for back-order and over-shipment. Once that information is in the system, BatchMaster will tell the receiver when the order should be accepted, placed on-hold, or returned for violation of the company receiving policy.

Pashka added, "We wanted to tackle data accuracy and reduce 'throwing things over the cubicle.' There were physical movements and time wasted in communicating verbally from one department to another. Once you start relying on this type of communication, the chance of introducing errors increases as well."

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Mixing it Up

House-Autry eventually chose BatchMaster as their ERP partner for a number of reasons. "What sealed the deal for us," says Pashka "was when we started evaluating our different business models, and the things that were unique to each market."

"Take pricing for example," notes Pashka. "While our retail customers are expectant of traditional volume pricing, our food service customers are quite different. Because there are so many individuals (salespeople, brokers, distributors) involved in the distribution process, pricing is complex."

"The standard of the food service industry is pricing per ton, "explained Pashka. "Each product, or family of products, is priced by volume order, as well as the zone (territory) where it's getting delivered to. Each item has a price matrix, based on the overall weight of the total order. It's a lot easier to figure out all of those commissions based on a percentage of that price, than keeping track of customer, product or promotional based pricing."

When House-Autry Mills first approached BatchMaster, the system provided nineteen different ways to price product. These different pricing models included volume, customer specific as well as item specific and group discounts, amongst others. BatchMaster also supported zone (territory) management.

Since Food Service represented only one aspect of the business, it was important to make sure that whatever solution House-Autry chose could support that business, traditional supermarket (commercial) sales as well as the retail business we handle for the occasional walk-up or Internet order.

Pashka goes on to say, "BatchMaster was able to take the existing pricing and zone features of their ERP solution and quickly configure the system to support all of our pricing needs. Because they recognized that other customers in our industry needed the same type of functionality, they went ahead and added these configurations to their BatchMaster Food ERP solution."

BatchMaster Food ERP is a special configuration of BatchMaster's ERP modules and features, prepared specifically for the requirements of Food (Process) Manufacturers. BatchMaster Food ERP is a result of extensive interviews and visits with existing customers and industry experts in the food manufacturing industry. BatchMaster Product Manager, John Houltham adds, "BatchMaster Food ERP represents an out-of-the-box offering of core system modules that increases the speed of implantation, by reducing the amount of customization and configuration that a typical ERP acquisition would require."

"We were able to implement and go live in about four months," notes Pashka. "I've seen a number of these types of implementation drag out with far less impressive results. When all was said and done, BatchMaster deployed a system that made company data more accessible and easier to use. BatchMaster has increased productivity, and reduced manual processes. The state of our company today is that our system and processes are a lot better and a lot faster."

House-Autry is just one example of how BatchMaster ERP listens to the requirements of their prospects and existing customers, to help define the next generation of their industry-specific software solution. Designed around the voice-of-the-customer, BatchMaster ERP represents a unique value proposition of target functionality, rapid deployment and a la carte' implementation of the right functionality delivered at just the right time.

For more information about BatchMaster Software, contact sales@batchmaster.com

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