Sirap-Gema: quality begins in the tray

by Wonderware Italia

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Maurizio Pantano, General Manager, Alpha Dec

Verolanuova (BS), Italy - Sirap-Gema decided to use InTouch HMI (Human Machine Interface) by Wonderware to monitor all the steps of production and distribution of trays for the food industry.

We all consider food traceability, which has become mandatory, as a complex process which foresees the record of all the components used to create a certain food, as well as of the manufacturing methods and the recipients of the production lot. This process is extremely complex, especially for the most elaborate products, but it is also necessary in order to safeguard the consumers’ health. Actually though, food traceability goes beyond retracing the product’s life, and takes into consideration the food packaging as well.

All industrial products, in fact, require the containers to be used as protection against external contamination, to improve their preservation and enhance their qualities. Even these products then, as they are directly in contact with food, have to be perfectly traceable in order to get back to the original lot, should any problem occur.

Food packaging

The companies that produce materials for food packaging, and are continuously looking for innovative solutions, also have a similar need: in Italy, the research in this field has reached excellent results in companies such as Sirap-Gema, part of the ITALMOBILIARE group (Milan), which specialises in the sector of thermal insulation and food packaging. The company markets increasingly innovative and safe solutions, often anticipating the competitors in respect to the regulations set by the European Union.

In this context, it is obvious for the management to invest on traceability technologies that help identifying not only the production, but also all the elements that comprise the final container. This is a very ambitious goal, especially considering the reduced number of solutions that have been implemented in this field so far. For this very reason, the Managers of Sirap-Gema decided to entrust the solutions of Wonderware, leader in this sector, and make the most of products that have already been tested internationally, and of the experience of Alpha Dec, the System Integrator from Varese specialised in MES.

The collaboration between Wonderware and Alpha Dec led to a comprehensive solution which meets the expectations, and enables Sirap-Gema to comply with all relevant legal obligations. As the plant manager of Sirap-Gema explains “Tracing means knowing the exact path of..."
the food and the packaging, and identifying their components. This is why in our company traceability is not only limited to the materials, but it also includes what is manufactured and shipped both to the end customer and to overseas suppliers for processing”.

A winning ‘imposition’

The case history of Sirap-Gema deserves special attention because the company management understood that the ‘imposition’ of the traceability tool, beyond the legal obligations, could become an excellent opportunity to invest in the improvement of the entire manufacturing process. For this reason, when the time came to make a choice, the management of Sirap-Gema evaluated the quotes of several suppliers: Wonderware made one that immediately seemed to be the most convincing.

Especially because, as the Sales Manager of Wonderware Italia, Raffaele Cefalo, underlines: “In addition to traceability, Sirap-Gema asked us for a comprehensive solution, which would enable, thanks to the automation of some processes, a quick and efficient interaction with the other company departments through the integration with the existing systems”.

In order to meet these requirements, the experience gained by Alpha Dec in the MES field was substantial, along with the use of the InTouch HMI solution by Wonderware and the technical support provided by the staff of the American multinational. The Wonderware philosophy, based on a partnership approach to projects, always proved itself a winning approach. As a matter of fact, besides the acknowledged value of a product such as InTouch HMI, the proposal presented by Wonderware and Alpha Dec was considered to be better than the competitors’, due to the ability of both companies to present themselves as a single partnership. This means that they both make the most of the mutual skills and always offer solutions that meet the real needs of the customers, without coming to compromises while deciding on the better solution, and guaranteeing that a greater attention will be paid to their issues.

InTouch HMI in detail

During the initial phase, the new system was implemented at the headquarters of Sirap-Gema in Verolanuova, in the province of Brescia. This is where the Research & Development laboratories and the most sophisticated manufacturing facilities are. “In this context – as the EDP head at Sirap-Gema explains - quality and speed are of extreme importance and, for this reason, we decided to rely on a qualified partner, capable of providing all the needed guarantees for the correct completion of the project”.

A requirement that Roberto Negrini, Marketing Director and Co-owner of Alpha Dec, is very familiar with: “In these projects, it is important that the customer is aware of the specific skills gained by the supplier, to allow both to proceed in tune, with the necessary reciprocal trust. Also for this reason, our willingness to closely work with the technicians of Sirap-Gema and to find together with them the most appropriate solutions to meet their needs was truly appreciated”.

One name only marks the decision: InTouch HMI. This HMI software created by Wonderware, which boasts over 270 thousand worldwide installations, enables the users to view and monitor both the plants and the equipment, providing an easy-to-use development environment for the engineers. These features, unique in this sector, allow the users to create, test and rapidly install powerful applications that associate the required information and make them available to access anywhere and in real time.

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We know everything
To make the most of the InTouch potentials, the Managers of Sirap-Gema asked Alpha Dec to use the latest communication protocols, also using a radio frequency system, which permits to identify and record the position of the items along the entire production line and within the warehouses. Maurizio Pantano, General Manager of Alpha Dec, explains: "With the RF system Sirap-Gema can check the exact location of all items and products used along the entire line: from the arrival of raw materials right through to the shipping operations”. But the monitoring process still continues outside the company, since the system can collect real time data also when the semi-finished products reach the several suppliers.
For this reason Sirap-Gema, which is especially appreciated for the quality of its products, has used the most advanced technology to collect all the information tied to the production and to pass them in real time over the Internet to the central EDP system. The management can therefore constantly monitor all processes and manufacturing times, promptly intervening to correct any possible deviation from the defined quality and quantity objectives.

“The Sirap-Gema production - explains the Plant Manager of Sirap-Gema - follows a very scrupulous and precise process. It was therefore necessary to adopt a reliable and widely tested technological system such as that Wonderware proposed. Actually, this is the only way to interconnect all the company branches and those of third parties, tracking the entire production process: from raw materials to the final destination of each individual lot of trays”.

Innovative choice
Sirap-Gema is the first Italian supplier for the large scale distribution and for the fresh meat packaging industry to adopt a complete traceability system. This represents a cutting-edge choice, which is rewarding an already innovative company. The control that InTouch HMI guarantees, and its ability to compare data in real-time, aren’t solely limited to tracking the production. The main benefit, besides the legal regulations, is in fact tied to the ability to constantly monitor the entire production. So, the company management can use a fundamental tool to find out, at any given time, how the production is proceeding and eventually intervene to guarantee the high quality levels which represent one of the distinguishing features of Sirap-Gema.

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