

Chocolate Potpourri Finds Sweet Solution



After experiencing operational inefficiencies, candy store truffle manufacturer Chocolate Potpourri sought out an affordable ERP solution that offered a single integrated database providing up-to-the minute, real-time data for manufacturing, distribution and accounting purposes. The right system would enable its executive team to better forecast and manage overall company operations.

Chocolate Potpourri all began with Marsha Gordon baking toffee in her kitchen as a hobby. In 1980, Marsha sampled truffles while enjoying a meal at Chicago's famous Drake Hotel. She was eager to learn how to make such a confection and the pastry chef — who remains a close family friend — was gracious enough to give her a lesson, leading Marsha to her passion for mastering truffles.

Within a few short months, Marsha began selling her confections to local party consultants, which led her to open Chocolate Potpourri in 1983. Marsha's eldest son, Richard Gordon, who is now the company president, believed in Chocolate Potpourri's potential and joined in his mother's quest to craft world-class European-style confections. By 1989, the company had moved out of Marsha's home and into the commercial space it is still located in, where they currently produce more than 30 different varieties of European-style truffles, Chicago toffee, pretzel poppers and many other elegant specialty confections.

The company's 20 employees manufacture these confections, which are marketed through several brands such as Veritas and How Sweet It Is out of the Glenview, IL facilities. Business is conducted through multiple channels, including specialty food stores and catalog houses, distributors, mail order, the Chocolate Potpourri [website](#)

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and private-label manufacturing.

Despite their rapid expansion and growth into multiple product lines, Chocolate Potpourri had been using a rudimentary distribution software package that provided limited data relating to the manufacturing side of the business. It also required hours of labor for exporting data for reports, which then had to be imported back into the system. In addition, with inefficient inventory control, the ingredient inventory levels were poorly and unsystematically maintained, the stocks largely calculated visually — a procedure very prone to error.

Chocolate Potpourri's online ordering system also presented issues, which was a serious problem due to their heavy reliance on Internet sales. Orders were placed via e-mail, necessitating their manual re-entry, a procedure that, along with filling orders, was cumbersome, time-consuming and prone to error, due to the dozens of stock codes being used. The accounting method, dating back to the early kitchen table days, offered only limited visibility into real-time corporate financials, and seriously limited the management and operational reporting capabilities. A new system was needed, despite the business's limited budget.

The desire to eliminate these inefficiencies prompted the company to seek an ERP solution with a single integrated database that provided up-to-date, real-time data for utilization and analysis by accounting, manufacturing and distribution divisions, and for the purposes of efficient management decision making. Another goal was to replace paper files with electronic documents and eliminate manual data entry.

What Chocolate Potpourri sought needed to be an affordable software solution to provide inventory optimization, lot traceability, automated ordering for e-commerce, forecasting capabilities and integration to shipping systems. Based on those requirements, the company selected SYSPRO software to run on their Windows 2003 and Windows 2000 Small Business operating systems. They installed an e-commerce site built on the .NET® platform that allowed for authorization of credit cards as well as other XML-based capabilities.

Each of the 22 truffles produced by the company represents a unique job and bill of materials. SYSPRO was implemented to help the company streamline the processes. Additionally, as an FDA-regulated food manufacturer, the SYSPRO lot traceability module allowed the company to track the history and future of every ingredient coming into the warehouse.

Chocolate Potpourri has established a product recall plan that fully leverages the extensive traceability and tracking capabilities inherent in SYSPRO software. Chocolate Potpourri's recall plan makes full use of these functionalities to trace product ingredients from origin, through the manufacturing process and to their ultimate destination while fully maintaining assurance certification and tracking expiration dates. The company's recall team has the ability to locate the supplier of any suspect ingredients, as well as production lots information and the dates on which the products in question were received.

The team can call up the jobs to which the ingredients were issued, determine

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which customers have purchased the resulting products and issue a product recall if required by government authorities. A trial recall allowed Chocolate Potpourri to do the full recall within 10 minutes, as opposed to several days.

According to Richard Gordon, president of Chocolate Potpourri, "SYSPRO ERP software not only enables us to compete successfully with the largest confectioners in the industry, but also to safeguard our customers and the public in the event of the recall of an ingredient."

Today, Chocolate Potpourri has gained the efficiencies of an integrated, real-time ERP solution — data only needs to be entered once, and it is immediately available to all departments. What's more, this same data is integrated to the company's shipping system, so that shipment information is automatically entered and very reliable. The increased visibility has created a dramatic improvement in customer service thanks to a reduced order-to-delivery cycle while reducing inventory and allowing accurate production planning.

Recently, the company instituted a new feature where customers have the ability go onto the website and select each truffle individually and save their customized order so that it can be replicated later. "We allow the customer to recreate the candy store experience," says Richard Gordon. He goes on to note that, because of the automated ordering process, the first time the company sees web orders is either on the shop floor or in the shipping department.

The SYSPRO software allows Chocolate Potpourri to automatically adjust inventory levels by sending e-mail alarms to management when ingredient safety levels are reached, eliminating halts in production due to the lack of a key ingredient. In addition, SYSPRO inventory forecasting gives the company a window into future order fulfillment, allowing stock adjustments to be made accordingly.

The results and successes Chocolate Potpourri have experienced with SYSPRO show that a relatively small company can utilize major technology to enable it to compete equally with larger competitors and, at the same time, enhance customer service.

For more information, please visit www.chocolatetruffles.com [1] and/or <http://americas.syspro.com/> [2].

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