

# Traceability Drives Business Improvements

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*Food Manufacturing* spoke with

Michael Gay of Rockwell Automation about how food companies can leverage tracking technology to successfully improve their businesses.

### **Q: What do automated tracking and tracing tools offer food manufacturers?**

**A:** Food and beverage manufacturers have traditionally relied on manual data collection methods to provide a best estimate on product and ingredient tracking, using paper-based reports traditionally kept in filing cabinets. An automated tracking and tracing solution provides manufacturers the ability to collect genealogy data more effectively with increased accuracy and store it electronically in an auditable database. From there, the data can be integrated with supply chain information for a holistic view into the complete organization, which allows for manufacturers to:

1. Accurately and electronically collect tracking details at all stages of production.
2. Identify the source of ingredients used in or allocated for food production.
3. Identify businesses to which products have been supplied.
4. Adhere to tracing systems and procedures.
5. Make tracing information available to authorities on demand.
6. Adequately label or identify products.

### **Q: How does this technology help with regards to food safety?**

**A:** Automated tracking and tracing tools provide food manufacturers with access to dramatically more reliable real-time information, pinpointing when and where products were shipped and what components were used in each one. Such technology enables manufacturers to not only meet regulatory demands, but also respond better in product-recall situations — tracking products faster, more accurately, more efficiently and more cost effectively.

Using today's automated tracking and tracing tools, manufacturers can examine even the smallest factors that might impact final quality. A producer of cookies, for example, might look to see if final quality is impacted by the use of a specific mixer or industrial oven in the manufacturing line. External factors, such as water supply and relative humidity, can also be isolated to examine the impact on a batch's final quality.

Moreover, by looking deep within the production process, automated tracking and tracing tools enable food manufacturers to identify the root causes behind production problems, prevent potential product quality issues and fortify the integrity of product and brand lines. No longer limited to collecting data on product yield and quantity, today's tracking and tracing tools are helping manufacturers implement revolutionary new capabilities to improve efficiency, increase cost savings and strengthen product quality control.

### **Q: How can manufacturers improve their supply chain to create a more responsive process?**

**A:** A well-implemented, automated product tracking and tracing solution provides a view into the key details of production throughout the supply chain, giving manufacturers the ability to respond better to demands at the retail end of the food and beverage manufacturing supply chain. In an effort to reduce extra inventory held in stockrooms, many retail outlets are looking for manufacturers to ship just enough product to replenish their shelves. In an increasingly competitive market, food manufacturers without the ability to respond to such demand run the risk of losing valuable contracts.

Automated track and trace solutions provide the ability to track production through each manufacturing area, supplying the key data needed to make informed decisions on actual completion dates. Advanced systems can also help manufacturers better meet customer requests for expedited orders by easily revising production schedules and more directly routing priority products through the manufacturing process.

Companies that are successful in improving the supply chain through responsive manufacturing processes have the opportunity to increase both revenue and brand marketability by earning prime shelf space at leading grocery and retail outlets.

### **Q: What aspects of the manufacturing process can be discovered using traceability tools that would otherwise go unnoticed?**

**A:** Tracking and traceability tools allow manufacturers to gain a complete view of the actual cost to manufacture a product, a task that is difficult to accomplish when

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relying solely on manual data collection. An automated tracking tool provides a holistic view of the manufacturing process by identifying the costs for each step in the production process, including:

1. Actual amount of raw materials used.
2. Yield from conversion processes.
3. Quantity of good product produced.
4. Amount of scrap.
5. Labor costs involved in each process step.
6. Utilities employed and their quantity.
7. Cycle for each step.
8. Equipment performance, including efficiency, downtime, cycle time and production rate.

### **Q: What can manufacturers do to get the most out of their tracking tools?**

**A:** Successful companies get the most out of their tracking and tracing tools by using the data collected to analyze each step of the manufacturing process, including the source of raw materials used, current operating conditions, product quality and even the personnel working when a given batch is created. Using such data, company leaders can identify the optimal conditions that lead to superior batches — resulting in products with excellent yield and quality.

Identifying granular areas for improvement generally requires a systematic approach to data collection, requiring tracking and tracing tools capable of analyzing specific data points. Properly implemented automated tracking and tracing solutions can collect this critical production data and provide applications that give users the ability to analyze and understand relationships to determine the cause of quality problems.

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*Interview by Lindsey Coblenz, Associate Editor, Food Manufacturing*

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