

ERP Lessons Learned

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In today's real-time economy, a process manufacturer's success is dependent on anticipating problems and preparing for prevention and resolutions. Without proper business intelligence in place, manufacturers are left vulnerable. That's one of the many reasons our business chose to implement an enterprise resource planning (ERP) solution.

Although there were many unknowns when it came to ERP technology at the time Paradise Tomato Kitchens implemented it, we knew we had processes that needed improving and saw it as a tool to help us improve the management of our product quality and financials. Initially, we leveraged a process manufacturing module that was bolted on to a discrete manufacturing ERP solution. We quickly realized we needed to transition to an ERP solution that was built from the ground up as a complete process manufacturing system. With that in mind, I wanted to share some of the lessons our company has learned along the way in order to help other manufacturers select, implement and utilize ERP technology to the fullest.



Must Love Processes

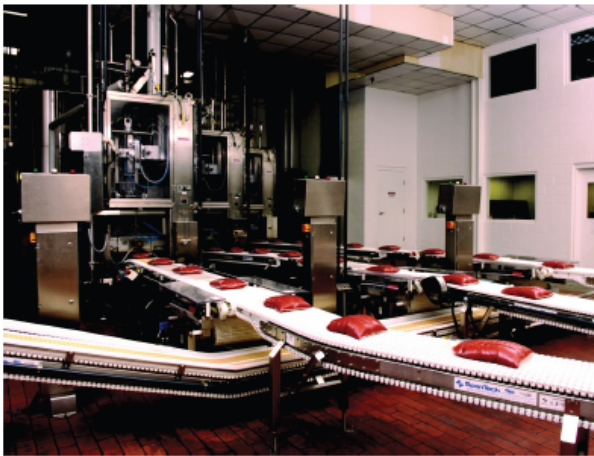
Finding the right ERP system can be pretty challenging, especially as there are so many options on the market. At Paradise, we evaluated quite a few that varied in scale from shop floor applications to Microsoft and InFor. We learned that while many claimed to be process manufacturing systems, the reality was most were more or less discrete ERP solutions.

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My advice to those searching for an ERP: look for a solution with an established track record for high performance. We chose Ross ERP because it had earned a positive reputation for top-to-bottom process manufacturing among a number of food, chemical and life sciences companies.

Additionally, I'd recommend finding a solution with a strong user community. The Ross user community works together to share best practices and solutions. Furthermore, they frequently interface with the Aptean development team, serving as catalysts for its continual software improvements.



Team Work Makes the ERP Dream Work

Another component of ERP success: getting buy-in from your team. Although IT was primarily responsible for finding the solution and implementing it, we included a variety of business units within the company in our decisions. There can be a tendency to skew ERP systems toward primarily meeting the needs of sales and finance, but for Paradise it was important that our business—as a whole—could benefit from the technology.

From production and engineering, to finance and customer service, everyone had a seat at the table

when it came to mapping out processes that would be managed and automated within our ERP solution. I'd recommend engaging at least director level members of each department during the ERP vetting and implementation phase. They can serve as executive sponsors and maintain balance over any competing interests.

Collaboration is also essential when building out workflows for each process. Our team chose to start with the end result in mind and mapped out processes in reverse. This gave us the opportunity to identify problem areas and refine as necessary.

While collaboration throughout the vetting and implementation process is vital for successfully launching an ERP solution within an organization, for its long-term success, IT in particular should be accountable for its ongoing maintenance and management. As there are many different ancillary solutions that need to integrate and coordinate with an ERP, like analytics, EDI and Factory MES, it's critical for IT to take the lead.

The Best Thing about ERP

Initially, I and the rest of the Paradise Tomato Kitchens team were determined to deploy an ERP system as our central point of record. We needed visibility. In the early days of implementation, our ERP system allowed us to maintain, in real-time, accurate food safety and financial records. While it continues to do that and that's hugely impactful, the capabilities we now have to drill down into our manufacturing processes and find root causes to issues and successes go beyond what we could have imagined.

Today, we use business information and analytics to plan and execute smarter and faster changes within our production line. We're leveraging real-time data and projected demand to better manage costing and pricing metrics to limit our exposure in the marketplace and increase our margins.

Furthermore, the enhanced visibility we've gained with ERP technology has helped us tenfold from a product quality perspective. Our track and trace capabilities, coupled with our quality assurance process, aided us in becoming BRC certified with an A rating.

As ERP technology has evolved through the years, it's become a vital part of our business. Its visibility, accuracy and real-time management have improved our overall operational efficiency.

Ryan Swain is the IT Director at Paradise Tomato Kitchens.