



SUCCESS STORY

Surlean Foods



Deacom Modernizes Business Processes, Unifies Data, and Improves Customer Support

OVERVIEW

Surlean Foods
www.surleanfoods.com
San Antonio, TX

BUSINESS CHALLENGES

The Senior Director of IT services had been spending too much time trying to make disparate ERP systems match and wasn't getting anywhere with the vendors to fix the many pain points.

The company needed a single ERP solution with MES and APIs including EDI.

Surlean Foods wanted their ERP vendor to handle support, maintenance, and updates, and to ensure that their solution would evolve with their needs and not become outdated.

Since 1979, family-owned custom food manufacturer Surlean Foods has been offering restaurant chains "back of house" solutions to increase quality and profitability. In recent years, the company has achieved this through streamlining operations, strategic executive decision-making and sourcing, unparalleled culinary R&D capabilities, and smarter supply chain optimization.

Surlean Foods started as a vertical integration of the founding company, L&H Packing, a meatpacking slaughterhouse facility. Surlean supplies quick service restaurants with products from coast to coast and even internationally.

We sat down with Senior Director of IT Services, Cory Simmons, to talk about how Deacom ERP software for batch and process manufacturers has helped to efficiently manage their end-to-end manufacturing and operations processes and enable the company to reduce its multi-system complexities and manual workarounds.

A two-headed ERP solution was fraught with challenges and pain points

Cory has been with the company since his hiring in 2004 as a software developer. At the time, Surlean Foods was operating on an AS 400-based ERP system and was moving to an ERP integrated with a Manufacturing Execution System (MES). In 2013, the fast-growing company was starting to see the shortcomings of their two-headed ERP system as the regular accounting solution and a separate MES. There were two separate databases and two disparate pieces of software that were not well-integrated and did not produce the same answers.



BENEFITS OF SWITCHING

Deacom's completely integrated ERP solution is designed for businesses like theirs, so there are no longer conflicting data sets, answers, and reports.

Deacom integrates all of the features Surlean Foods needs including MES and APIs including EDI, which has made customer retention and acquisition easier.

Deacom's knowledgeable and flexible support team was able to customize implementation support to the precise needs of the business, and provide exceptional ongoing support.

Recalling those days, Cory says "I was spending a significant amount of time trying to make the systems match in the decade since we integrated them back in 2004-5. There were many pain points; we tried to get our software vendors to fix their problems and weren't getting anywhere with them, so we decided to look for something new."

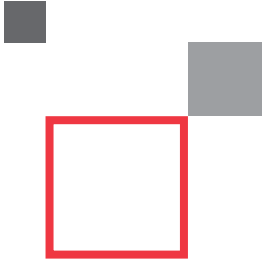
The search for a new, unified ERP solution with comprehensive support was underway

Cory's first step was to hire a consultant. This new partner set the company's parameters for a new ERP solution and found solutions that fit Surlean Foods' budget. They developed an RFI questionnaire with the system requirements. "Chief among them," Cory says, "was a single system, not one with an MES bolted on. [Electronic Data Interchange \(EDI\)](#) was another requirement. The AS 400-based system was open sourced, an appealing point at the time we purchased it, but the flip side to that was no support of something that our in-house developers had modified. The MES system was also lacking in support."

One of the most critical requirements would be support. "We needed a good support team on the vendor side to keep the ERP maintained and up to date. Our system had gotten way out of date by 2010. With the previous vendor, they required that each facility use a separate database, which presented a challenge when we had unique database table identifiers that needed to be shared between the facilities. Once we were expanding to a third and fourth, this became a problem."

API capabilities including EDIs were atop the list of necessary features

Surlean Foods also wanted the option to build Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) with other software, something that Surlean's customers and distributors had wanted. Cory says "EDI is one example; we wanted to build custom APIs and that requires a support team. Deacom has built a couple of those for us now, and we couldn't have done it without them."



“We finally got to the one answer we were looking for. We were able to finally have meetings that were productive instead of trying to find out why one number doesn’t match another.”

After inviting four finalists to tour the Surlean Foods facilities, meet with power users, and even visit key customers, one of the selling points for Deacom was their pricing model. Cory recalls, “We had learned that often, ERP implementations go long and over budget. Surlean Foods is a family company with a small-town feel. When Jay Deakins flew down to San Antonio, he really connected with our president in that regard.”

Lessons learned from a first implementation pave the way for seamless success

That first implementation began in 2014. Cory recalls, “Deacom assigned a project manager, systems engineer, and data integrator and we started going through the process. Scope creep on our end eventually shut down that implementation. Post-mortem, when we discussed what went wrong, we saw we lacked internal project management and needed to redefine the scope and define success and stick to it. So, we ended up integrating Deacom first into one of our other operating companies which was a simpler operation. We planned for six months and ended up integrating in four. The project management for Deacom made that implementation a success.”

With that first success in the books, now it was time for the second – the complete Surlean Foods implementation. The team took a detailed project management approach, while Deacom assigned their own project manager who would be the point of contact throughout. “It helps to have a PM on each side, and what was also valuable was that Deacom assigned two process engineers. One looked over accounting and purchasing and the other looked over the shop floor. Each worked with subject matter experts at Surlean Foods, while I focused on data migration. Meanwhile, training took place in September; the teams learned to use the scanners and main application software, and everybody got up to speed by go-live, October 1st.”

This time, the implementation was seamless. Cory says, “We finally got to the one answer we were looking for. We were able to finally have meetings that were productive instead of trying to find out why one number doesn’t match another.”



Surlean Foods also implemented EDI. They were finally able to deliver on the promise to customers that would be EDI capable, which the big distributors had been wanting for years. In addition, they were able to provide that same service to smaller customers.

“Jumping to a new ERP can be difficult,” Cory says. “But we were able to use the ERP system to replicate existing functionality and then start tacking new things on to it. Because we now had a single system with a support group built on APIs, it really became a time saver and company efficiency booster.”

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Integration with proprietary platforms and other software was also unified

Cory reports that Surlean Foods has also been able to build a business intelligence platform on top of Deacom. In the data warehouse, they created a whole array of dashboards and reports that pull data and allow executives to make more informed decisions. That wasn't possible in the prior two-headed system. “There have been cases where customers have asked us for data exports, and we are able to provide that information,” Cory says. “I'm able to construct the datasets, so Deacom made it easy. That's how we were able to build the BI platform and the data warehouse that we have now. That has been really huge in being able to customize some very easy-to-understand dashboards and reports.”

There was a need a couple of years ago to work with a third-party maintenance, work order, and supply system. “With Deacom's support and developer team, they were able to build an API that would talk to that system and pass data back and forth. Now our parts master and vendor master reside in Deacom, but they are shared with the supply system so purchase orders can be entered in the software, using those vendors and parts.”

“[Deacom] has been really huge in being able to customize some very easy to understand dashboards and reports.”



Deacom dramatically boosted employee efficiency and productivity

As for overall business efficiency gains, Cory proudly offers that “I observed how things were done under the previous systems, and I could see the latency. I could see the frustration of our people using the old system. When I look at the speed and efficiency with which they do their jobs now, the difference is night and day. We can accomplish much more without increasing headcount.”

“Deacom’s support has been stellar,” says Cory. “Deacom has been very responsive when I have encountered a problem or an answer or number I wasn’t sure how the system arrived at. I can usually get on the phone immediately and escalate to someone in development if necessary. We can talk databases because that’s my language. I’ve been impressed with that. I don’t think I would get that from a bigger ERP system, so love the relationship we have with Deacom. It’s been personalized and very hands-on.”

Going forward, the Surlean Foods team plans on achieving automation with their equipment on the production floor and expects Deacom will be indispensable in that process. Cory says, “We can put our heads together, create a project, manage it, and get it done together. It’s like having a partner in our business evolution.”

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