CASE STUDY

UniPro Foodservice

Large U.S. foodservice cooperative finds increasing cooperation on data quality initiative

CHALLENGE

Representing more than 450 distributor members and 960 locations, UniPro Foodservice (UniPro) continuously looks for ways to help its members gain efficiencies while meeting evolving customer demands. Increasingly, foodservice operators expect and need valuable allergen and nutritional data. With more than 138,000 products from manufacturers, UniPro members needed an effective way to search for and access complete and accurate product data.

SOLUTION

UniPro worked closely with member advisors to create the UniPro Master Data Management (MDM) Portal. Using data pools, manufacturers can now electronically publish core attributes and marketing and nutritional attributes. All data is then synchronized and shared with the MDM Portal via the Global Data Synchronization Network™ (GDSN®), giving members an efficient way to access quality product information and images.

BENEFITS

Manufacturers can now quickly distribute comprehensive information about their products to UniPro's hundreds of member locations. Sales representatives and members also save time when researching products and can make more informed selling and purchasing decisions. UniPro believes its members and their customers are happier with easy access to allergen and nutritional information.

UNIPRO FOODSERVICE, Inc.®

Unified Professionals In Distribution

"Distributors are in desperate need of value-added allergen and nutritional information to fulfill customer demand. The UniPro MDM Portal gives them the resource to understand what's in a product and any risk components that might be associated with it."

— **VAN PERRY**, Vice President of Business Analysis, UniPro Foodservice

UniPro is one of the largest foodservice cooperatives in the world, representing more than 450 member companies in 960 locations with a collective sales volume of approximately $66 billion.

CEO Roger Toomey has always been an adamant believer in using technology and quality data to benefit the foodservice industry as well as UniPro's members. In 2009, UniPro was a founding member of the Foodservice GS1 US Standards Initiative and soon embarked on its own initiative—creating the UniPro Master Data Management Portal.

"At UniPro, we believe all of our members, regardless of size, should have access to valuable product data," says Van Perry, vice president of Business Analysis. "That's why we created the MDM Portal.

"We strongly believe it can deliver the 'hard and soft' returns on investment for both our manufacturers and members."

While Perry and Dave Devlin, vice president of UniPro's Vendor Engagement department, oversee and manage the MDM Portal on behalf of UniPro, their distributor members—large and small—are truly the architects, setting requirements along with providing input for ongoing enhancements.

Perry points to perhaps the most compelling reason why UniPro's manufacturers should publish product data and images on the MDM Portal. "Distributors are in desperate need of value-added allergen and nutritional information to fulfill customer demand. The UniPro MDM Portal gives them the resource to understand what's in a product and any risk components that might be associated with it."

Before the MDM Portal, manufacturers would supply UniPro with product data that might subsequently undergo changes, yet not be updated accordingly. "It was up to our members to chase either the supplier's sales rep or go to its website to look for needed product information," explains Devlin. "Sources were manual and extremely time-consuming to access and maintain."

Today, on behalf of its members, UniPro transparently works with manufacturers to publish Phase 1 attributes like weight, case and carton sizes, and shelf life, and Phase 2 attributes such as nutritional elements, ingredients and allergens.

According to UniPro, about 82 percent of UniPro manufacturers are currently publishing to the MDM Portal via data pools, sharing and synchronizing this data through the GDSN.

> "Getting complete and accurate data is an industry movement now—not just one company requesting, but multiple voices asking for what they need to be successful."
>
> — DAVE DEVLIN, Vice President of Vendor Engagement, UniPro Foodservice

While manufacturer participation in the MDM Portal is not mandatory at this time, Devlin advises it is strongly encouraged. "Manufacturers are realizing it's a good business decision since their published product data is shared immediately with hundreds of member locations. The MDM Portal gives them a speed-to-market benefit for new items and a 'natural' advantage when distributor sales reps and customers need access to information for buying decisions."

Approximately 100 member organizations use the UniPro MDM Portal today, and the number is growing. "Our members appreciate that they can do quick and complete searches for the 138,000 products on the portal," Perry adds. "And approximately 18 percent are fully or partially integrating our UniPro product master with their own systems to be able to consolidate information, run analytics, look at trends and usage—making use of the data, which is tremendously important when running a foodservice business."

Perry and Devlin have learned best practices that they readily share. Both stress the importance of executive support and ownership. Another "must" is educating and continuously communicating the value of the initiative to all trading partners—at various levels throughout their organizations.

Perry and Devlin have seen foodservice initiatives "come and go"; yet, they acknowledge that this time is different. Both are bullish about the MDM Portal's growth. "With planning, persistence and constant communication, this initiative has sprouted wings and is starting to fly on its own," says Perry.

"It's a different time—a different market," adds Devlin. "Getting complete and accurate data is an industry movement now—not just one company requesting, but multiple voices asking for what they need to be successful."

To learn more about UniPro, visit www.uniprofoodservice.com.

To learn more about the Foodservice GS1 US Standards Initiative, visit www.gs1us.org/foodservice.

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