

Supplier compliance manager – can investment in a web system work?

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Food safety remains the number one issue for all food processors and manufacturers, brand holders and private label food retailers. Suppliers need to demonstrate effective management and control of all internal processes, but supplier compliance management (SCM) is under the spotlight more than ever, in the wake of global food scares and product recalls.

As a leading, global supplier of poultry, meat and ingredients to the food industry, Rectory Food Group must ensure high standards of supply chain assurance. It is of the utmost importance, especially under today's pressures on the food industry to ensure full traceability.

Suppliers worldwide

The company's suppliers are truly worldwide ranging from frozen ingredients suppliers in China to poultry producers in Lithuania, so it is therefore vital to offer the highest standards in SCM, to demonstrate to its customers that all the products it supplies meet industry standards and specifications. Its customers are not only in the food manufacturing and processing industries but are also in the food service and butchery sector and the chain extends through wholesalers and distributors.

In the last 12 months, Rectory Food Group has increased its portfolio by adding around 100 new products, which means there has been a rapid and significant increase in the number of new suppliers, to a total of over 150 from 25 countries. A substantial amount of time and resources are dedicated to completing, maintaining and updating supplier audit questionnaires (SAQs), to ensure consistently high standards when appointing and monitoring suppliers. The technical team faced a growing challenge of obtaining audit information from new suppli-



ers and validating them – a critical issue when ensuring food safety and maintaining certification to schemes and standards set by the British Retail Consortium (BRC) and International Food Standards (IFS).

As the company's technical manager I am responsible for managing all technical requirements and it became apparent that the business was and still is growing at a rapid pace with new products from new suppliers being added to our portfolio every month. Furthermore, to satisfy the need to comply with legal and commercial requirements the amount of paper-work per supplier was also growing. To fulfil my responsibility of ensuring all suppliers adhere to our approval system I knew I had to develop a new system.

Up to this moment the company had been managing SCM and SAQs using technical assistants and paper records on an internal data base to track, record and manage supplier approval. We now needed to do this in a more timely fashion and to achieve consistency, quality and effective management.

It was apparent that the volume, complexity and range of data called for a computer based system and there were a number of options on the market, but would they meet our own specific needs? It was also apparent that the truly global nature of our business meant we would need a web based system that would allow our suppliers and potential suppliers to access their data easily and securely.

Rectory Food Group is required to satisfy our customers' SAQ requirements and through that process I have become aware and familiar with the Qadex system that several of them asked us to use. I always found their system easy to access, straightforward and an effective way to supply information for our customers' records.

Qadex provides an internet-based service, which enables food ingredient suppliers and their customers to exchange questionnaires and data electronically. It is specifically designed for the international food industry and applications include supplier auditing,

supply chain assurance and ingredient specifications, as well as environmental audits.

I now approached the company as a potential customer for data management rather than a provider of data. The team there gave me confidence as they described how I would be able to ease the pressure on our team and deal with our 100+ suppliers. A trial programme was proposed and we carried it out to discover that we worked well together.

The food technology and wide experience of the Qadex staff meant that we talked the same language and their

director Stephen Whyte

was very helpful and

able to deal

with our

requests,

no matter

how

unusual they

sounded. In the early days of

working together we were about to sign up 10 new ingredients suppliers, who all needed auditing in a short space of time, so we worked closely with Qadex. This pilot project proved to be a smooth and efficient process and increased our confidence as we began to roll out the system through our existing suppliers.

We have suppliers from all areas of the food industry, from poultry and meat, through to garlic, seeds and pulses and other food ingredients. At the moment our work with Qadex has extended into the frozen ingredients side of the business but as we extend our portfolio, we hope to expand this to raw, cooked and retail poultry products.

Valuable cost savings

The Qadex system saves me employing at least one more person and it costs me half the price. Any such cost savings are welcome as the food industry is still feeling the pinch. As we gained a closer look at the Qadex system I realised it would be even more cost effective because of the time saving in bringing a new supplier up to approved standards. The system is accessi-

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ble anywhere in the world via a web browser to authorised users with a password. This means we and our suppliers can access it no matter where we are.

As well as efficiently and accurately maintaining our supplier assurance records, the system brings other benefits. It makes it much easier and quicker to find the documents as they are all logged online, and if there is a food scare we can ask the system to check the specifications to see which products it affects and which suppliers produce them so we can deal with this much quicker.

We use Qadex for full supplier audit management systems. The service includes compiling audits, gathering spec sheets, formatting the documents and uploading supplier approval documents. It also obtains assurances of certifications such as BRC and HACCP, and there are helpful rolling reminders when updates are needed.

In cases where suppliers provide product information in their own format, Qadex is able to convert the information to the standard template, identify any gaps, obtain missing information, saving us time and resources.

We went 'live' in October, which was per-

fect timing for us, as it is just in time for one of our key trading periods – Christmas. The suppliers we have approached so far have given positive feedback on the system and are already seeing the benefits it brings, as it has speeded up the whole process. This does take a lot of pressure off us, to chase around the world for missing information, as the Qadex team are great at ensuring all forms are fully completed.

Qadex provides a helpdesk to advise and direct suppliers, as well as a full support centre, 24/7 answering service and live web chats. It also offers multilingual services and can translate documents into 56 languages. Clients include Dawn Foods, Penguin Foods and Food Partners.

Our system is fully up and running and we are already feeling the benefits within the team. Our data is instantly available online and if staff need any product information they can access it 24/7. This means that if our customers need quick answers on a product or ingredient that we supply we can respond accurately and efficiently.

The quality and consistency of information received from suppliers is enhanced and we now have a wider capacity to provide tech-

nical support to our customers. Our customers can rest assured that all products we supply are fully audited and approved and that our records are up to the minute, and can be accessed at any time.

Additional benefits

Additional benefits come from the ease with which we can interrogate data and produce reports to highlight any problem areas. We now know immediately the approval status of all of our suppliers. If we have a product recall, for example, we can use this to see exactly which products and suppliers are affected.

Web based supplier compliance management has provided a huge benefit to Rectory Food Group and enhanced its position and reputation within the supply chain. We are able to demonstrate to auditors, inspectors and customers that we have the most up to date assurances of our suppliers for essential food safety systems.

The Qadex system has proved to be a simple tool but is highly effective and efficient, easy to use and saves time and money in the long run. In some ways I believe that for half the price of one technical team member I have gained the benefit of an extra food technology team. ■

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