

Viskase Seals In Quality with FlexNet

In 1925, Viskase invented the skinless hot dog when they developed the first removable casing for cooking this ubiquitous meat product. From these beginnings emerged a world leader in cellulose, plastic and fibrous film and packaging for the food industry. As an innovator, Viskase delivers new casing solutions that improve processor productivity, food safety and product quality. These casings are printable, removable, permeable to smoke and moisture for curing and processing, or impermeable to lock in flavors.

Plants in the U.S. (Arkansas and Tennessee), France (Thaon-Les-Vosges and Beauvais), Brazil, Mexico, Italy and the Philippines operate under the direction of the Darien, Illinois corporate offices to serve food processors around the globe. The company's diverse manufacturing structure with centralized direction created challenges to standardize products and processes to maintain quality while supporting the differences in individual plants and equipment. Product information and quality data management were obviously of particular concern.

The Thaon-Les-Vosges plant had most recently developed a home-grown quality management system to handle their complex specifications, which included thousands of quality measurements. But, the system was not designed as a corporate-wide solution with centralized control and coordination. Other plants used other home-grown systems so nothing was centrally integrated or easily compared.

All for One; One for All

Viskase chose Apriso's FlexNet Quality as their corporate quality planning, management and execution system to enforce process standardization and centralized management. The company's quality requirements are quite complex; it was critical to have considerable flexibility and interoperability with their corporate SAP ERP System. SAP production orders are now automatically available. FlexNet offers Viskase a Quality solution with real-time visibility and control across their manufacturing operations to enable consistent KPI reporting that best meets each of Viskase's quality requirements, and much more.

Because the Thaon-Les-Vosges quality system was used as a model for FlexNet, it was chosen as the site for first implementation. Based on the ease of creating user interfaces, FlexNet was tailored to resemble displays that workers knew and liked already from their prior system. At the same time, new functionality was added – including the ability to spot trends faster – bringing Viskase quality management to new levels. After the system was rolled out in Thaon-Les-Vosges in France, deployment followed in the U.S., Mexico, Brazil and then the Philippines.

As a result, workers have significantly expanded their capabilities in mastering quality in coordination with corporate engineering and compliance standards within a familiar and comfortable "look and feel." Engineered processes are now better synchronized with local procedures, requirements and documented measurements to an extent that could never have been imagined with their prior legacy techniques.



CASING SOLUTIONS WORLDWIDE®



Benefits Achieved

- Centralized control of specifications and quality requirements for consistent quality world-wide
- Quick and easy adaptation of standard specifications to local machine settings
- Efficient and accurate translation of corporate standards into customer and job specific variations
- Greater and more specific information available on the plant floor for efficiency and high quality
- Manual specification and quality documentation processes have been eliminated

Complexity, Well In Hand

Viskase's products are produced through a multi-part process. Material is extruded to a proper thickness and shape, and is then converted into the final finished product to match each customer's need. The finishing process is then completed with proprietary, custom-made equipment. There are many measurement points to monitor and document the quality of the process and product. The challenge is that most machines are truly unique, having been engineered through decades of generations of development. Thus, even though process standards and quality requirements can be defined and administered centrally, specific machine controls and settings often vary by machine by location.

FlexNet embodies the "flex" in its name by enabling Viskase to publish engineered standards to each plant where a local (machine-level) implementation of that standard has been defined and used. Furthermore, each customer order may contain variations that must be accommodated in the process specification, which are then defined and maintained on a "same-as-except" basis. This process makes development and administration of complex process definitions and quality requirements easier to visualize, define and administer at the local level while maintaining corporate standard compatibility. By leveraging the "net" component of FlexNet, it was possible to form a closed loop process encompassing centrally managed product definitions with site-specific machine settings to better synchronize continuous improvement while maintaining process standardization to better maintain quality standards from a centralized perspective.

Usability and Control, with More to Come

No matter where a casing is produced, Viskase customers can be assured that the quality is consistently high and all attributes are within specified limits. With greater visibility and control, operators are now more confident they are doing things correctly with clear and complete instructions – including photos and diagrams where needed – to help them set up and manage their processes. Integration with SAP's ERP makes order information available on the FlexNet screen, so operators can always be aware of applicable requirements and priorities. And, any new customer or order-specific requirements can be quickly and easily accommodated with confidence that they remain within corporate design and specifications.

Viskase is now utilizing FlexNet Quality to address quality and specifications requirements. Future expansions of quality control to add production management and execution as well as greater operational intelligence and reporting into the system are active or being planned. It's a natural follow-on, adding to the existing integration with SAP, to expand their FlexNet capabilities and user interface screens as well as the passing of the information directly to SAP. As a platform-based solution, FlexNet applications can be readily added while still retaining existing integration, user interfaces and data mapping strategies. This has resulted in improved productivity from plant workers' routines while expanding activity management, modification and reporting to a new level of timeliness and accuracy.

About Apriso

Apriso Corporation is a software company dedicated to helping manufacturers achieve and sustain operational excellence. Apriso serves nearly 100 customers in 45+ countries across the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia. Learn more at <http://www.apriso.com>.

"The real benefit of FlexNet Quality is to have a common repository for our shirring standard, which makes things easier to compare in our standard and sampling plans."

Benoit Clerc
EMEA Quality & Development
Director,
Viskase

"FlexNet lets us quickly see all QC data history (Qualification, Controls, QC Holds, etc.) for a particular order to assist with quicker identification of trends, investigation of QC Holds and customer issues."

Greg T. Hall
Manager, Quality Engineering,
Viskase

