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**EDITORIAL**

**Executing Packaging Efficiency**

As drug makers begin to serialize every salable unit right on the packaging line, they may be adding new systems and processes to generate and handle a lot of data. In an era of lean manufacturing, however, companies may fear that serialization could add significant costs and burden.

“Pharmaceutical companies are focusing on plant efficiencies these days,” reports Joseph Ringwood, vice president of sales and operations for Systech (Cranbury, NJ). To do so, “many are trying to apply manufacturing execution systems (MES) to packaging lines with a server-level application. But the new complication is serialization.”



Traditional MES solutions, however, were not specifically designed to handle packaging processes, let alone serialization efforts, Ringwood points out.

With its software platforms for managing different levels of packaging operations, Systech decided to integrate them all with what Ringwood calls the first end-to-end packaging execution system (PES).

“You cannot have serialization without a PES,” he says. “Giving items unique numbers and making associations demands that such information be managed and sent up into other business systems.”

Systech’s PES operates at three layers, bringing the following functions into a single infrastructure:

- Maintain safety and accuracy at the machine level using Systech Sentri during vision inspection.
- Manage all packaging and labeling devices at the line level using Systech Advisor. Systech’s Serialized Product Tracking (SPT) application, an application to Advisor, enables serialization.
- Collect all data—serialization or otherwise—to transmit to other plant levels like enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems using Systech Guardian.

“There is a tremendous amount of data generated by packaging operations that goes nowhere,” says Ringwood. “PES allows management to use that data.”

In October, The ARC Advisory Group (Dedham, MA) issued a white paper discussing how packaging execution systems can benefit lean manufacturing initiatives. The paper describes how a pharmaceutical manufacturer implementing 2-D Datamatrix bar codes for serialization selected Systech’s PES. The SPT application has enabled “serialization of products at the item, case, and pallet level.”

The manufacturer's next step is to extend the PES to include "plant-level management of EPC serial numbers and overall equipment effectiveness measurement using Systech Guardian," which "connects to ERP and EPCIS systems providing a single point interface to the enterprise and, ultimately, to the supply chain and customer." Currently involving 25 packaging lines across 12 worldwide sites, the project demonstrated "measurable performance improvements at the first plant."

With item serialization close to becoming law, pharmaceutical manufacturers are facing tremendous tasks.

But not impossible. The pharma company described in ARC's white paper was able to manage product serialization while realizing performance improvements, thanks to a packaging execution system. Your company could, too.

Daphne Allen  
Editor

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