



Sharp: Employing Systech's Productized Packaging Execution System (PES) to Overcome Packaging Challenges

Today's pharmaceutical packaging landscape is complex, with new requirements, products, and market demands surfacing continuously. Although manufacturers are meeting these challenges every day, they regularly turn to contract packagers to handle particular situations, such as specialized packaging, overflow, and volume. As they look to contract packagers, some manufacturers' products also require serialization to address regulations or to protect high value products. Because contract packagers manage these responsibilities for numerous products per line, they confront the toughest vision inspection, line management, and serialization in the pharmaceutical industry.

Sharp Corporation, a contract packaging company, is undertaking these challenges daily. With over 75 customers, Sharp on average handles 10 or more products and various different package configurations on any given day. Sharp decided to look for a packaging information management platform that would ensure protection of their customers' products while optimizing their packaging services offering. The only way any solution could effectively handle the demands of their environment was if it is quickly configurable.

"Our customers rely on us to execute packaging projects to their quality as well as to our standards and to sometimes tackle the packaging challenges they haven't yet tried internally," explains Rick Seibert, Vice President of Business Development at Sharp Corporation. "We normally don't have time to customize and re-integrate lines for each new product configuration. We need nimble lines that can be set-up and configured quickly and change over in minutes versus hours."

Due to the requirements of their contract packaging environment, Sharp selected Systech's productized Packaging Execution System (PES) platform to address vision inspection, line management, and serialization. Systech's PES is a single system that integrates all critical packaging line information systems. Since the solution is productized, it is easily installed and replicable line-to-line or plant-to-plant. This repeatability reduces design, deployment and associated training costs.

Systech's PES is also configurable, enabling it to be adaptable and flexible. The PES platform's adaptability and flexibility allows it to quickly and easily accommodate line component changes and support a wide variety of packaging line functions without requiring code re-writes. Furthermore, the system easily expands to meet increased demands and new requirements, allowing manufacturers to leverage existing investment in infrastructure rather than make expensive changes to the technology. This helps manufacturers manage investments over periods, ensuring Return on Investment (ROI).

Vision Inspection

To meet the vision inspection needs of the numerous products they have per line, Sharp needed a user-friendly, configurable solution that could accurately inspect products at higher line speeds. They employed Systech Senti® for its ability to meet these requirements. Senti is widely deployed by the pharmaceutical industry. Its recipe-driven, one-click set-up enables fast, precise line operation, thereby increasing productivity, throughput, and speed to market for manufacturers. This set-up, along with its model-based font training, protects Sharp and the manufacturers it serves by ensuring packaging accuracy. In addition, Senti's adaptable software allows it to accommodate changes, such as product change-over and new products with different dosage and color requirements.

Line Management

Manufacturers use contract packagers for special products with smaller lot sizes, requiring them to perform frequent line set-ups and changeovers. Sharp is using Systech Advisor® to address these dynamic packaging demands in an ever-changing landscape.

“Whereas changing other lines with just vision inspection cameras takes an ET (electronic technician) a couple of hours, change-over on the Advisor lines is handled by a mechanic in just ten minutes. Because Advisor is recipe driven, all settings are already in the system and once established, lines do not need to be re-validated,” states Seibert.

Requiring validation just once speeds line operation, which decreases costs while increasing throughput and speed to market. Furthermore, when packagers make a change to any Advisor system, they create a back-up of the set-up, allowing them to re-establish it at any time. Quick, easy line set-up directly impacts manufacturers’ and contract packagers’ bottom lines, and for Sharp, where change-over on the serialization line can occur multiple times each day, the efficiency-related savings and benefits are significant.

Serialization

Manufacturers must have serialization capabilities to address current European and pending U.S. regulations. Moreover, many leading pharmaceutical companies see serialization as an ongoing component of their brand integrity and supply chain strategy. According to Sharp, their customers are serializing high value products, such as products that require temperature control or specialized handling, or products that have a high black market street value. For these reasons, Sharp wanted to establish a solution that could meet the serialization needs of any customer.

“Serialization is a way for manufacturers to become more efficient by ensuring that the right drug gets to the right client at the right time. We believe the future for serialization solutions extend well beyond the pending regulatory requirements for track and trace. The value of having specific information on a single product basis will ultimately assist our customers to build the value of their brands, while ultimately driving cost out of their supply chains and improving the clinical outcomes of patients through improved compliance and adherence to medication regimens,” replies Seibert.

In addition to providing a single point of operation across multiple Advisor lines, Systech Guardian® provides a fully automated serialization application called Systech Serialized Product Tracking (Systech SPT). Systech SPT connects with the manufacturer’s enterprise repository of serial number data and provides serial number data to the packaging line when it is needed. At the line level, Advisor assigns and verifies codes, tracks items through the packaging process, and establishes relevant parent-child relationships. SPT also tracks post-lot changes off of the packaging line to ensure true and complete serialization.

Systech SPT acts as a gateway between enterprise IT systems and packaging operations. Regardless of the speed or availability of enterprise servers, the packaging operation can continue running at maximum throughput. Similarly, the SPT gateway collects data from the entire on-line and off-line packaging operation, ensuring the integrity of serialization data before it is delivered back to the enterprise IT systems. Moreover, Systech’s open architecture allows serialization customers to easily connect to remote systems. Leveraging this open architecture, Sharp can seamlessly deliver data directly to any customer’s enterprise software.

According to Sharp, Systech’s PES platform is easy to use and can quickly accommodate changes. The solution also enables fast line operation, easy-changeover, and fully automated serialization. These capabilities provide Sharp with the means to successfully take on the most challenging packaging environment and address the various demands of their 75 customers. Although Sharp is a contract packager, many pharmaceutical manufacturers confront similar packaging issues daily. They package a multitude of products and require the ability to quickly change-over lines, ensure quality inspection, and serialize high value products. Therefore, the reasons that Sharp employed Systech apply to all packagers. Manufacturers in general benefit from Systech’s productized PES platform because they also need flexible, adaptable solutions that allow them to more efficiently and accurately package their products while meeting the new demands of the industry.

Cephalon's Serialization Program Places New Demands on Contract Packager

Recognizing the benefits of serialization, Cephalon approached Sharp to serialize pre-packaged cartons of a high value oncology product. Because this manufacturer has had previous success with Systech, they introduced Sharp to Systech's serialization capabilities.

On average, Cephalon's oncology product changes hands six to nine times before the final sale. This can cause the product to become damaged and short-dated while also making the manufacturer susceptible to fraudulent and erroneous returns. For a two billion dollar company, continually issuing credit for the return of a high-value product significantly impacts its financial results. Cephalon realizes that serializing each individual product will eventually enhance supply chain visibility to help them recognize and reduce fraud where it is occurring.

"The great challenge for this or any serialization project was communicating packaging data between the enterprise systems and the packaging operation with absolute precision," noted Seibert. "As an outsourced packager, that communication is made even more complex."

To enable Systech's serialization application, Systech SPT, to communicate directly between Sharp's packaging line and Cephalon's SAP All, a basic VPN was established. The serialized numbers for the products are transferred out of Cephalon using a VPN, and the numbers enter Systech Guardian at Sharp's facility. SPT sends these numbers to Systech Advisor, the line management solution, as they are required on the packaging line. SPT then collects the serialized numbers and lot data from Advisor and reports them to Guardian. Ultimately, the complete information leaves Guardian through the VPN connection and goes back to Cephalon's ERP, where commissioned numbers can be used across the enterprise.

By employing a productized, configurable PES solution that enables effective communication between the IT and enterprise environments, Sharp ensures the integrity of serialization data traveling up to the enterprise while protecting throughput on the packaging line – an essential capability that protects their bottom line as well as the Cephalon's bottom line.



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