Ignition Aids Major Growth for Food-Industry Leader

SugarCreek Leverages Software for Continuous Improvement and OT-IT Convergence

After more than 50 years of growth and success, SugarCreek is not resting on its laurels. The company, which provides packaged foods for retail and food-service channels, expects more than $700 million in sales in 2017 — and is working toward $1 billion per year by 2020. Its raw and fully cooked products are used by widely known brands in the United States and abroad.

To help improve its efficiency, the company uses Ignition by Inductive Automation®, an industrial application platform for building solutions in human-machine interfaces (HMI), supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA), manufacturing execution systems (MES), and the Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT).

SugarCreek has been using Ignition for four years, and has constantly expanded the platform's role in its operations. SugarCreek has six food manufacturing facilities in Ohio, Indiana, and Kansas. The company's newest plant, located in Cambridge City, Ind., was named Plant of the Year by *Food Engineering* magazine in 2016. The Cambridge City plant is a technologically advanced facility that covers 418,000 square feet, and is expected to add $300 million per year in production capacity.

John G. Richardson, Chairman/CEO of SugarCreek, said Ignition is helping the company continue its strong growth. "With Ignition, it's exciting to finally have the ability to get information in a context and format we can really use to change and improve the business," said Richardson.

"Before we put Ignition in, getting real-time data was quite often a struggle," said Ed Rodden, chief information officer for SugarCreek. "Typically, we were looking at information that was a day old.

SugarCreek now has real-time data to share across OT and IT.

Now with Ignition, the data is immediately available and highly actionable. It's a world of difference."

Improvements at Several Sites

The company wanted more information about downtime occurrences, and also wanted MES, alarm notification, better reporting, and improved control for refrigeration and wastewater systems. Ignition gave SugarCreek all that and more. The company has seen significant cost savings and production improvements.

"We use Ignition for virtually all aspects of our operations," said Dan Stauft, SugarCreek's director of operations technology (OT). "With Ignition, especially in the plants where we've got MES installed and we're using it on full lines, we have full visibility to everything going on at each manufacturing line. We know counts in, counts out, the speed of the line, temperature, power. We know everything there is to know, all in real time."

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Stauft became interested in Ignition after arriving at SugarCreek in 2013. "Prior to joining SugarCreek, I spent 21 years in manufacturing engineering, in automotive assembly," said Stauft. "That's a very data-intensive operation. When I came here, I found that the food industry isn't nearly as tech-nological as the automotive industry. My objective was to bring SugarCreek up to par with the high-technology, automotive-type plants."

Stauft was new to Ignition himself, but quickly came up to speed on it, and showed Rodden how helpful Ignition could be. "We downloaded the Ignition trial," said Stauft. "We modeled a line with the trial, so we could show our management team the capabilities of the system before we had to purchase anything. That was a very powerful tool."

A High-Value Solution

Rodden had been an advocate of statistical process control within SugarCreek for a long time, so he's very pleased with the amount of real-time data provided by Ignition. Ignition's unlimited licensing model keeps costs low, which is another big plus. "Ignition fundamentally has all the functionality of some very high-dollar applications," said Rodden. "But it's at a much lower cost. Ignition just stands out as having high value."

The unlimited licensing helps SugarCreek use Ignition as much as it wants. "On a typical day, we've got around 50 clients open," said Stauft.

"About 10 of those are big-screen monitors at our plants." SugarCreek created unique HMI screens with Ignition. Production lines and machines are shown as overlays on the plants' floor plans. The screens are interactive, so clicking on an area of the floor plan reveals more information.

Ignition also helps SugarCreek with continuous improvement and OT-IT convergence. The company's organizational structure includes a strong connection between OT and IT. Rodden said the transition to that structure went smoothly, and that Stauft works really well with Todd Pugh, the company's IT director. Ignition enhances the common vision. "Ignition gives us a shared platform, so it's easy to share information," said Pugh. He also praised Ignition for its overall capability. "We haven't found anything that Ignition can't handle on the plant floor," he said.

Delivering Useful Data

"Ignition delivers everything I want," said Craig Langhals, continuous improvement manager. "I'm a data freak, and always have been. Throughout my career, it's always been a problem to get to the data, and put it in a form that I can digest and deliver to other people. Ignition gives us the ability to build layer upon layer of data that we can utilize."

Langhals also appreciates the speed at which changes can be made in Ignition. "Generally, it takes Dan about 10 seconds to make the changes I request," he said. "Usually it's right on the spot, in front of us."

SugarCreek's improvements are all focused on delivering better service to its customers, and that includes sharing data that comes out of Ignition. "Our customers are very pleased with the data we're able to provide," said Andrew Alexander, operations manager for SugarCreek. "We're the only one in the industry that's able to do this, and it's the first time a lot of our customers have seen anything like it."

Watch the case study video online at:
bit.ly/ia-SugarCreek