

“With Sofon we improved our bills of materials, routings, workflow and the quality of our quotations”



f.l.t.r. Kees Klerx IT MANAGER
Björn Moonen SALES SUPPORT GROUP

The GEA Refrigeration Division manufactures refrigeration systems. These systems are put to use primarily in the food industry (breweries, slaughterhouses), during industrial processes, for sports and relaxation (ice skating rinks) and in air-conditioning systems. The division consists of various types of companies: 3 manufacturing companies, 30 sales offices and 10 contracting companies who produce refrigeration systems from all the components. The Refrigeration Division has purchased Sofon to bring together all the components produced in the division in one catalog. In this way, sales offices can, for example, produce complete quotations with incredible ease and efficiency. Sofon has been live since February 2009 at GEA Grasso BV – one of the manufacturing companies within the division. Apart from that, GEA Grasso is involved in the worldwide roll-out of Sofon at the 30 sales offices. Björn Moonen (Sales Support Group) and Kees Klerx (IT Manager) talk about the procedure whereby Sofon was selected, the worldwide roll-out and their plans for the future.

GEA Refrigeration Division utilizes Sofon worldwide

COMPLEXITY

GEA Grasso has to deal with an enormous variety in components. Klerx explains: “Generally speaking, we have 10⁵⁰ variations, as we produce to customer order. This complexity can only be controlled and managed using a smart system. We ourselves started building a configurator years ago. At the time, we mostly learned how not to go about this. After that, for years we had another configurator that was no longer up to the standard required after Grasso was taken over by GEA. Sales were decentralized at the time, so the system no longer made sense for the organization. We then switched to another configurator and quickly experienced its disadvantages: the system was almost impossible to install and keep in the air as a stand-alone system, was difficult to customize, generated mediocre reports and had a low performance. We wanted a configurator that could deal with these disadvantages and could operate both with and without the ERP system Microsoft Dynamics AX. Meanwhile, Goedhart – another manufacturing company in the division – had been working with Sofon to their complete satisfaction for some time and contracting company Gresco was also looking for a configurator. We then did an evaluation together with the contracting companies: should we keep the old configurator or should we go for Sofon? Sofon came out of the evaluation as much the better choice.”

SIMPLER AND MORE TRANSPARENT STRUCTURE

After the choice for Sofon was made, modeling started. Klerx continues: “We no longer needed to capture all the knowledge in the organization; we already had that in place because we worked with three earlier generations of configurators. That doesn’t mean we could make use of the knowledge on a one-on-one basis, or even that we wanted to; it gave us a reason for a completely different construction of bills of materials, routings and workflow. We managed to bring the number of lines in bills of materials down from 13,000 to 2,200. This has made the structure simpler and more transparent. We managed to build the models in a few months, but because of the whole job of conversion, some extra optimization needs to be done. The good thing about Sofon is that we ourselves can take care of adjustments directly. You know immediately where an inadequacy is located and then a change can be easily made. An adjustment can be entered live without burdening the rest of the organization.”

INTERFACE WITH AX

After the models were built in Sofon, it was time for the interface with AX. Klerx goes on: “The interface performance is excellent. We have even been able to solve limitations that we ran into in AX with functionalities that



“With Sofon we improved our bills of materials, routings, workflow and the quality of our quotations”

Sofon offers. If, for example, an aggregate needs to be built, Aggregate Construction needs a compressor for this first. If this is planned in AX, the compressor is scheduled parallel to the aggregate. We used to be able to solve this by shifting the date manually. With Sofon we can remove this manual work by taking care of this in the bill of materials structure.” Moonen adds: “Before we worked with Sofon, the bill of materials would only become known in the system after confirmation by the customer. After that we would have to check whether materials were in-house to start with. Now, using Sofon, we can reserve stocks and schedule the workplace properly, and do this automatically and in a timely manner.” GEA Grasso has also achieved advantages in the area of parallel planning. Moonen continues: “It’s standard practice for AX to plan machines one after the other, even if you want to produce more than one at the same time, as happens continually at GEA Grasso. Using our previous configurator it was impossible to indicate that parallel planning was needed, but with Sofon this is thankfully possible. For us it is a big advantage that we can process *the actual situation* in our ERP system.” GEA Grasso can also calculate exactly how much time is needed to make a machine. This is good for the definition of costs and the planning of capacity.

NO NEED TO WORRY ABOUT SOFTWARE
GEA Grasso doesn’t need to worry about Sofon software. Klerx explains: “During the

period that we were building models and testing, we switched to a newer AX version and also to another hosting center for Sofon and AX without any problems.” Moonen adds: “Sofon is also a pleasure to use. Model building, maintenance and management have all become much more user-friendly. Sofon is also very conveniently arranged for users. This is because of the logical build-up of the question and answer set-up that is used during configuration. That was a different story with our old configurator. Apart from that, our quotations have improved markedly in terms of content and quality and we can adjust documents specifically per user. Previously, each department received the same document as the customer. Now these wishes and requirements are defined for each department, so that they only receive the documents containing information relevant for them. Sofon is now set-up for worldwide operation at some 15 companies within the division. Apart from that, a few companies need to be trained. Moonen goes on: “GEA Grasso is the first manufacturing company within the division to go ‘live’ with Sofon in combination with AX. Until now, each manufacturing company has had their own selection software but this is to change in the short term. It is now important that the other manufacturing companies make their models available in Sofon as soon as possible so that the sales organization will really be able to reap the benefits of Sofon, because then we will be working with only one system.”

WHAT DID GEA GRASSO BV ACHIEVE WITH SOFON?

- All components produced within the division can be allocated to one catalog with which the sales offices can make complete quotations. In this way, staff needs to work with only one system, instead of working with different systems
- Management of enormous variety of components
- No need to worry about Sofon software
- Improvement workflow, routings and build-up of bills of materials; from 13,000 lines in the bills of materials to 2,200
- Bill of materials is built-up during the configuration
- Material, capacity, parallel and sequential planning better applicable without manual work
- Possibility of calculating machine times
- Model building, maintenance, management and use, is user-friendly and arranged conveniently
- Quotations improved markedly in terms of content and quality
- Generation user-specific internal and external documents

