Food Testing Lab

Industry: Food & Beverage
Client Since: 2007
Location: Midwest, U.S.

How LabLynx Helped a Leading Food Tester Improve Efficiency and Customer Service

Overview

When a leading food testing, inspection, and certification company in the Midwest needed a laboratory information management system (LIMS) to boost efficiency in its main laboratory, it turned to LabLynx for results. Food manufacturers have historically relied on this lab to ensure their products are safe for people to eat, and that's serious business that surprisingly requires managing a massive amount of data.

With LabLynx at its side, the lab was able to see immediate gains in its workflow efficiency, result accuracy, and customer service. These gains further allowed them to add several additional laboratories to expand their operations further in a similarly effective way, setting them up for greater long-term success.

Main challenges in the food testing industry

Not only do the origins of every ingredient in our food have to be documented and recorded in case of recalls, but food must also be tested up-front for pathogens like salmonella, listeria, and e-coli, which can make people quite ill. All this testing has to take place before the food spoils and prior to being delivered to stores and restaurants for end-users to purchase and consume.

Back in the mid-2000s, when this leading lab was smaller but already beginning to grow, it lacked efficiency in managing data and the agility that its clients required of its food testing. "We needed to have a system that was able to track results and produce certificate analysis reports for our clients to help them get their food products to market faster," said an IT spokesperson who worked for the lab during that period.

Speed was really the biggest challenge. "Trucks for one of our biggest clients would be loaded with food and couldn't be released until the client received the certificate of analysis with the testing results showing that food was safe to deliver to retailers," they added.

Testing results also provided the lab's clients with information they needed to make decisions such as which retailer should get the products. For example, if a meat item didn't pass the specs for a higher grade, the decision could be made to sell it to a different retailer than was originally intended. Or the meat could be prepared a different way; for example, it could be cooked rather than sold raw.

Another important reason for adding a LIMS system was for compliance and certification purposes. "In order to be certified for standards like ISO 17025, the laboratory had to show the traceability of samples, who touched them and when, what their methods were, and how those methods were run," the spokesperson said.

They added, "You have to have that audit trail not just with food but with anything you're testing, so if there's any sort of recall, you can prove what happened, where it happened, and what corrective actions were taken. If you want to be a lab that has any sort of certification, you really need to have a LIMS system where you can manage this type of data." A LIMS system was also needed to keep track of proficiency training for staff to maintain ISO certification.

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Why this food testing leader chose LabLynx

The lab's owners chose LabLynx LIMS for several reasons. First of all, they liked the idea of working with a smaller company that could provide a personal touch and cater to their needs.

They also wanted a solution that was configurable and scalable over time as their business grew. "We didn't want a big-box solution where we could get a whole bunch of functionality that we didn't need. We wanted to start small, then grow and have the LIMS system grow along with us. That's exactly what happened, and we've been very happy with the decision," the lab said.

During the implementation process, LabLynx LIMS software was integrated to interface with the lab's instrumentation and testing equipment, including analytical chemistry and pathogen machines.

Gaining even further benefit, the lab was even able to integrate the LIMS with its accounting software to automate customer invoicing.

Fast results with LabLynx LIMS

Once the LabLynx LIMS solution was configured and installed, the food testing company began improving speed and customer service for their main client right away. "As soon as testing on a sample was complete, the certificate of analysis report was immediately and automatically sent to the client so that they could take the necessary steps to release the trucks to deliver their food products. That's because the LIMS system actually interfaced with that client's system."

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This was much easier than having to wait for a lab technician to review results and manually enter information into a report. This also improved accuracy by removing the human element and reducing errors.

Their LabLynx LIMS also managed testing parameters for different clients and food products, keeping track of all the miscellaneous limits. And in instances where samples didn't pass testing, the LIMS was configured to automatically flag out-of-spec results for a confirmation test or other additional steps.

Basically, with an efficient LIMS system in place, staff no longer has to remember all the specs for different clients and samples or look up the information in spreadsheets. The lab noted that that type of automation ultimately proves to be "huge, especially if you're a lab that's growing. It allows you to increase speed so you can make more money and get results to clients faster which makes them happy."

LabLynx LIMS ensured data security as well, and when the food testing lab grew and added several additional laboratories, the LIMS software allowed them to get up to speed and become operational faster.

CASE STUDY

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LabLynx is there for ongoing support, growth, and changes

The lab was assigned a dedicated LabLynx project manager, making themself available to provide ongoing support and assistance in the event of emergencies. The lab even views LabLynx as a sounding board for bouncing off new ideas, according to the spokesperson.

"It's nice to still have the ability to call and talk to or email a human if you want or to just enter in a ticket at your leisure. Just the ease of contacting LabLynx has been awesome," they said. But more than that, LabLynx is also there to listen if you have an idea of how something might work better. "You can call them and say, 'You know it would be really cool if the system could do this,' and LabLynx will work with you and talk you through that, and then they'll work with their developer to make it happen."

They added, "Many companies don't have support folks who can help you do that—bring your ideas to life—like LabLynx can. And it's nice because they really think outside the box and want to do everything they can to help you and make sure that their LIMS system is helping you as much as it possibly can."

Another satisfied LabLynx LIMS customer

For this food testing leader, choosing LabLynx as their LIMS expert proved to be a great return on investment. The lab saw benefits in multiple areas, including speed, efficiency, traceability, security, reduced staffing needs, and greater satisfaction with their investment. For LabLynx, being part of that kind of client success is truly priceless.

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