

IMS HELPS DAMAFRO OPTIMIZE ITS PACKAGING LINE



IDENTIFICATION FOR TODAY AND BEYOND

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Founded in 1984 by Mr. Claude Bonnet, the Fromagerie Clément, whose cheeses are distributed under the brand Damafro, has experienced sharp growth. Right from the start, the Fromagerie Clément has always enhanced its product line throughout Canada. Whether it is soft white cheeses, surface-ripened cheeses, soft and semi-hard interior-ripened cheeses, hard cheeses, semi-firm interior-ripened cheeses, fresh cheese or yogurt, the cheese aficionado will find something he likes among the more than 300 products and different formats that Damafro offers.

Claude Bonnet's story begins in France, his country of origin, where he specialized in the production of well-known soft cheeses, such as Brie de Meaux and Melun, Coulommier and Camembert to name just a few. He then decided to come to Québec and found the Fromagerie Clément, which he then bequeathed to his two sons, Philippe and Michel.

The company quickly became one of the largest in the industry, with market shares of close to 40% of the soft-cheese market and domestic production. The Damafro brand is sold in most Canadian supermarkets.

PACKAGING CHEESES, NOT AN EASY JOB

Since so many different formats of cheese are produced, the packaging and labelling process is obviously a very complex affair. Right from the start, these processes were primarily carried out manually. Two individual packaging lines were used, which could only process one product at a time. This constraint required precise coordination for choosing the products to be packaged since the time required for starting up the packaging line for a given product was relatively long.

As well, no information had been collected on product weight and no data was gathered during the actual process. Thus, there was no tracking capability, which sometimes led to incorrect information being printed on the labels. For example, an incorrect expiry date. And since no data was collected, useful information, such as the number of kilograms produced per batch were unknown.

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THREE NEW CONSTRAINTS... THAT LED TO SAVINGS!

In 2003, certain Damafro clients, food chains, made a request that would greatly complicate Damafro packaging. These supermarkets required, from then on, the cutting up of the larger cheeses, such as bries and camemberts, be done in the Damafro plant instead of in the supermarket as it had always been done. This new constraint meant a tremendous increase in the number of products to package. Whereas in the past, a single large cheese would be packaged, the same cheese now had

to be cut into 20 pieces, which is a far more tedious process. The time required for packaging was now 30 times greater. To manage, Damafro had to increase the number of employees on the packaging line, but the problem was that there was not enough space for all these new packers!

In addition to this new requirement from the grocery stores, regulations on providing nutritional information became more demanding and the two-inch-wide label that had been used was no longer large enough to write all the new information required. To accommodate this new requirement, four-inch-wide labels had to be used. The problem was that these new labels were too large and could not be affixed to a single side of the product. They had to be folded to be able to cover both sides.

Lastly, the third constraint was unionizing the employees, which meant a major hike in salaries. These three constraints served as a catalyst of sorts to push Damafro into reviewing all its packaging processes in order to optimize the time and costs associated with these processes.

LOOKING FOR A SOLUTION

The plant's management team became responsible for reviewing the packaging line in order to improve productivity and meet the various constraints. From then on, there would be more products to package, more information to display on the label and the number of packaging employees had to be reduced following salary increases. A big challenge indeed!

Damafro was aware that such a challenge would not be easy to overcome. Indeed, this is not the first time that the team members had to manage this type of project. One of the team members had already overseen a similar project while working at the Lactel Group several years before. That team member knew exactly the type of solution the company needed. Being very satisfied with their work and the relationship he developed with them in the past, he immediately thought of IMS and gave them a call.



IMS and Damafro have known each other for a few years now. Indeed, IMS is Damafro's supplier for anything involving labels and certain other types of equipment, such as printer applicators and multilingual scales, as well as offering technical support.

"What we want above all in choosing this new solution," explains André Haché, Plant Manager, "was to find a real partner who was as concerned as we were about making our operations a success. We needed a supplier who was always there and available once the solution was implemented, and a partner on which we could count for solutions to any problem. In this type of project, adjustments must be made and there is always a breaking-in period. Therefore, it was very important for us to be certain that our supplier would be there for us in these situations and that they would do everything possible to quickly make the necessary changes."

Since they had already worked with IMS in a similar situation, the management team knew that they were competent in this area. «They are very cooperative and do everything to fix problems and make changes quickly and without trying to point fingers.»

For Damafro, it was very important that the supplier of this solution was also the supplier of its labels. The reason was two-fold. First of all, to negotiate better prices for labels and protect against price fluctuations, and second, that the label contract would be a kind of insurance policy so that the new solution was properly implemented for the packaging line.

Damafro already knew the type of solution that they wanted and they knew IMS. They did look at the competition to research price ranges and solutions in order to give themselves some power to negotiate. Over time, Damafro came to know the IMS representative, Sylvain Frigon, well, and developed a trusting relationship with him. It is with IMS that they wanted to do business, and this new contract enabled Damafro to pay less for the labels as well as to ensure that prices would never exceed those of another supplier by more than 10%. If this were ever the case, the prices would be automatically adjusted.

THE SOLUTION

The solution proposed by IMS substantially improved the productivity of the packaging line. Whereas in the past Damafro ran two packaging lines, which could only process one product at a time, the new solution involved only one packaging line that could process three different products at once.

This line has three work tables where the employees pack the different Damafro products into the boxes. The specific boxes for each product are then pushed on a conveyor running at a speed of 35 feet per minute. The boxes then continue on their way to a second, faster, conveyor, running at a speed of 100 to 135 feet per minute. The purpose of this is to create a distance between each box. This distance is needed for the next step: weighing.

The boxes are weighed by a 9480 Expressweigher scale. While the box is being weighed, the barcode reader scans the product information, which it sends, via the in-house software, PControl, developed by IMS, to the applicator printer that prints the information on the product's label. The box then continues along the line to a third conveyor, with a speed of 120 to 145 feet per minute, where the applicator printer applies the label to the box with all the required information on it: Product name, quantity, weight, expiry date, etc. Since the label is too large to be fully applied on only one surface of the box, a stamper folds the label along the edge of the box. The in-house software, PControl, then captures data and produces reports on performance and packaging volumes for different work shifts, on production per batch, and other essential information to ensure efficient resource management.

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IMPLEMENTING THE SOLUTION

Damafro's Management Team is unanimous in saying that the implementation of the solution went very smoothly. The major challenge was compatibility between the new computer systems. Since

Damafro uses practically all the functions offered by the system, the project required many adjustments. But these adjustments were all made quickly and without a

hitch. Again, according to the management team, IMS was always very cooperative and faced up to all its responsibilities. When necessary, it did not hesitate to use all the staff at its disposal. Moreover, by using 'PC Anywhere', a remote problem-solving option, problem solving was always addressed quickly and instantly. Now that's a true partner!

The Advantages of the Solution at the back ▶



THE ADVANTAGES OF THE SOLUTION

SAVINGS IN LABOUR

The cost of labour was halved with the two-fold increase in productivity.

SPACE AND PRODUCTIVITY

Damafro can now process three different products simultaneously on the new packaging line versus only one on the previous line, not to mention that using a single packaging line instead of two means saving a lot of space.

DATA ENTRY

Damafro now automatically saves information that they were not able to save in the past. For example, they know the number of kilograms produced by batch and they now have automated cheese yield calculations.

TRACKING

With improved data entry, and better communication between the different steps in the packaging process, much more information can be stored and saved in the database using the bar-code labels.

IN SUMMARY

All plant employees are very happy with the work done by their partner, IMS. In addition to benefiting from a more productive and less costly solution, Damafro can also see the substantial savings for the labels. They especially appreciated IMS for how it respected its commitments regarding all technical aspects of the solution. There were never any contradictions or bad disappointments. «When adjustments had to be made, or when we were unsure, IMS did not try to pass the problem off onto someone else or to fingerpoint. When these events arose, IMS worked with us to solve the situation, as a real partner does,” concluded Mr. Haché.

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To learn how IMS can help your company, contact **514-336-3213** or **1-888-336-3213**, or visit our Web site at **www.imsinc.ca**.

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