Eight “Must-Have” ERP Features for Food Processors

At a Glance

- This paper summarizes the eight features a food or beverage processor must have in its ERP software.

- Benefits of an integrated ERP solution range from complete one-up/one-back traceability to electronic document management, to centralized recipe management tied to costing.

- By obtaining all of the features it must have in one Software as a Service (SaaS) Cloud solution like Plex Online, a food processor optimizes the performance of its entire enterprise.
Eight “Must-Have” ERP Features for Food Processors

Food and beverage processors are facing tougher challenges than ever before.

To meet the recordkeeping and lot-tracking requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act and other regulations, they must be able to rapidly identify and track every single ingredient in their products, from receipt through processing, packaging, and shipping, to the exact customer location.

Food processors are turning more and more frequently to innovative software solutions that help them achieve this level of traceability and better manage their overall operations. Today's leading ERP solutions go beyond the historical ERP strengths of finance and accounting to give organizations the ability to achieve complete process visibility — enabling them to meet their stringent requirements and avoid delays or product recalls.

Food processors aiming to achieve optimal performance must have systems that also have non-conformance/corrective action, preventative actions and statistical process control capabilities. Support for these features ensures that the company achieves the highest levels of quality, safety, productivity and profitability.

Bringing the Best ERP Solution to the Foods Industry

Plex Online is an industry-recognized Cloud, or Software as a Service (SaaS) ERP solution for food processors. Alone among the leading ERP solutions for the food and beverage industry, Plex Online brings food processors all eight of the features they must have in their ERP systems.

1) One-up/One-back Traceability

Food processors must be able to trace lot information for ingredients and finished goods to isolate problems quickly and with precision. They must have a system that enables them to accurately track individual lots, bins or packages as they flow through processing and distribution steps. To achieve best-in-class performance, some processors may even need to track products as far back as the farms that produced their original raw ingredients.
Software like Plex Online can meet this need, providing detailed historical information related to supply chain, production, inspection, genealogy and usage.

Because it is a Cloud/SaaS solution, Plex Online provides its users the ability to instantly track the genealogy of any product, at any time and from anywhere with an Internet connection. Imagine being in a customer’s office and being asked to identify the source of a specific ingredient — and being able to log on and find the information immediately.

2) Quality and Supply Chain Management

The ability to manage production quality is critical to food processors. Their ERP systems must provide the capability to track real-time data on all aspects of manufacturing and supply during production, and store the data in archives for audits or future reference.

Plex Online’s quality management functionalities enable food processors to track quality using tools like conformance/corrective and preventative action and statistical process controls, and other best practices. With this industry-leading ERP system, the quality functions link with supply chain management functions to give processors a complete view of their quality performance one step back and one step forward in the supply chain — from their suppliers’ operations through “next-step” customers.

3) Food Safety Capabilities

Food processors must have an ERP system that supports a comprehensive food safety management plan. For example, the system must support hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP) plans, process flow charting, statistical process controls, electronic signatures and more.

Plex Online provides this functionality, enabling processors to transform from a reactive to a preventative food safety culture.

4) Batch Recipe Management

Food processors’ ERP software must have the ability to track all data related to their batch recipes — descriptive information, technical properties, quantities, costing information, notes and history, all in user-definable unit. Best practices include clear alerts and notifications regarding possible allergens, with the data stored for years — or even decades.
The amount of data can be extensive, particularly for operations that produce dozens or hundreds of recipe combinations. That’s why it is critical that food processors rely upon a Cloud/SaaS solution like Plex Online, a solution that accurately identifies and tracks information for every ingredient in every batch produced by its user companies – and which keeps all data online and accessible at all times.

5) Electronic Document Management

Food processors strive to achieve the greatest possible productivity. They must have a software system that provides electronic document management in support of a paperless environment. Not only does this save employees time, it speeds up overall operations and reduces room for human error.

“Anyone can now trace product data right down to the lot or case number.”

Plex Online, for example, enables food processors to produce and attach electronic files in any format — jpg, Word, Excel, pdf, or any other format requested by the customer — to sales orders, item masters, purchase orders, or accounting transaction files. Additionally, all revisions of these documents are controlled in a Document Management System for a complete product history record.

6) Inventory Optimization

In food processing, excess inventory is more than just wasted cost. When perishable raw materials are involved, surplus inventory and delays in processing can also lead to quality and safety issues. This is why inventory optimization is a “must-have” ERP feature for food processors.

The ERP system must include traceability features and materials requirements planning (MRP) functionality, enabling the processor to plan “just-in-time” delivery of ingredients or raw materials.

Plex Online includes this functionality, enabling food processors to achieve detailed traceability, both upstream and downstream through production to shipment. Its streamlined MRP functionality helps its users achieve higher profits by minimizing inventory holding costs and reducing delays caused by lack of raw materials.
7) Single-Source System

Food processors need an ERP system that enables them to trace costs associated with individual products and product lines right down to the ingredients used in every one of their products. At the same time, they don’t need separate systems that manage financials, production, quality, inventory and more. They must have a single system that provides all of this functionality.

Plex Online is a single-source solution that includes all production and accounting functions. Rather than a traditional scenario of separate software packages, Plex Online contains natively linked functions that cover virtually every department and activity within the processing enterprise, so data flows seamlessly among departments that used to hold standalone silos of information. There’s no need to build “patches” between systems or reconcile different reports generated from different systems.

Every department accesses the same, real-time information. Plex Online provides a single version of the truth.

8) Customizable Barcoding

Food processors must have an ERP system with built-in barcode functionality, including label printing and scanning, and the system must allow for customization to meet unique requirements. Barcoding enables system users to perform accurate and speedy quality checks across their entire product lines, as well as tracking detailed cost information at every step of the process. Users scan barcodes on work orders, read all of the items required at each stage of each recipe, then scan the pre-measured and barcoded raw materials for that step to ensure that the product contains all the right ingredients added in the right sequence.

Plex Online offers built-in barcoding functionality that meets this “must-have” requirement, and supports any format or symbology needed by individual customers. Users are able to meet GS1 barcode and data standards, and supply-chain partners can share product information. Plex Online can create barcode labels based on a variety of GS1 barcode standards and facilitate the communication of GS1 data, through EDI, to a variety of trading partners.

The system is flexible and can be customized to address particular processors’ issues. For example, it can add allergen symbols on the barcodes of potentially life-threatening products and raw materials. This visual cue helps food processors ensure the safety and quality of their operations.
Getting What You Must Have

A flexible Internet-based solution like Plex Online brings food and beverage processors all eight of the features they must have to meet their health and safety requirements, produce the highest-quality products, operate efficiently and maximize their profitability.

In addition, because it utilizes the Cloud/SaaS delivery model, Plex Online enables the food manufacturing enterprise to avoid costly licenses and complex hardware and software infrastructures. Its customers use the Internet to access systems that are deployed and maintained off-premise. They enjoy ease of use as well as industry-leading security and connectivity. And perhaps best of all, they never need to suffer from using an outdated system, or fear losing customized functionality in the next upgrade. With Plex Online, all users are always on the most up-to-date version of the software, and new features and functions are made available on a daily basis.

“Plex Online provides a single version of the truth”

About Plex Systems Inc.

Plex Systems Inc. is the developer of the Plex Online Food Safety Management System (FSMS) and Plex Online ERP, a Software as a service (SaaS)/Cloud ERP solution serving the food and beverage industry. Plex Online FSMS offers industry-leading features for virtually every department within a processor and/or manufacturer, including Manufacturing Operations Management (MOM) / plant floor control; instant traceability and recall management; electronic HACCP with integrated SPC; and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) for finance and management. Plex Online FSMS’s comprehensive functional coverage delivers a complete view of enterprise operations, enabling management to run its business at maximum efficiency. Founded in 1995, Plex Systems is headquartered in Troy, Michigan, with customers around the globe. Plex Systems and Plex Online are trademarks of Plex Systems Inc. More information is available at www.plex.com.