

Mobility with accountability

New software system supplies route sales representatives with intuitive tools to offer better customer service.

by Dan Malovany

When Pan-O-Gold Baking Co. began its search to update its legacy route accounting system — one that dated back to the 1980s — the St. Cloud, MN-based company polled about 100 of its route service representatives (RSRs) and sales managers to find out what they needed.

The objective a few years ago was to develop a Top 10 list of software features that would allow its nearly 400 RSRs serving nine Midwestern states to better manage routes, increase sales and reduce returns, according to Bob Gartland, senior vice-president and general manager.

Those requests included color-coding “featured” bread, buns and other baked goods at various stores and supplying quicker, more interactive and easier-to-access data-specific information. “We wanted to get more feedback from our system so that our RSRs could forecast better orders for the week ahead,” Mr. Gartland recalled.

During the vetting process, MiT Systems caught Pan-O-Gold’s attention. “MiT’s demo proved to us that the software contained certain features and would not require a lot of customization for what our company wanted,” Mr. Gartland recalled. “Probably eight of our Top 10 requests were already in the system.”

Additionally, he said, the MiT representatives team understood the nuances of direct-store delivery (DSD) of short-shelf-life products and had previously worked with other baking companies providing efficient solutions.

In mid 2017, Pan-O-Gold committed to using the MiTEzSales Mobile software, which offered to set up a pilot program to test the software and find ways to tweak it to ensure its compatibility with the bakery’s new ERP system and its handheld hardware.

Initially, 30 RSRs within a specific geographic area tested the MiTEzSales Mobile software for a couple

of weeks. “That was a remarkable experience,” Mr. Gartland recalled. “We found during the pilot program that the MiT software was very intuitive and very fast. Our RSRs were really comfortable with the software just after two days, so it was amazing.”

During the pilot program, he added, the MiT team took feedback from the RSRs and the bakery’s IT department and even worked weekends and off hours to integrate, modify, adapt and fully integrate the mobile and ERP systems.

Then as a part of a “train the trainer” program, divisional sales managers rode on routes to learn how MiT’s software worked from the initial RSRs. On Feb. 22, the rollout began with those sales managers now training the RSRs in their designated geographic areas. It successfully concluded just two weeks later on March 8.

“They absolutely love it,” Mr. Gartland said. “Our RSRs are better able to use their data and run programs more effectively. The MiTEzSales Mobile software has tabs across many screens allowing the RSRs to rapidly work the shelves.”

MiT’s software is also improving communication between RSRs and managers who use web-based dashboards to review time-specific data for SKUs sold, store credits, inspections, standing orders and other meaningful data in a brief five-minute meeting at the end of the day. “We want our RSRs to do their own ordering, not just do what their sales managers say,” Mr. Gartland pointed out. “Now that there is more valuable data available to us, it helps us accomplish this goal.”

Initial response from the field has been positive. “I talked to a fair share of our RSRs and sales managers about MiT, and there’s no doubt we have a more satisfied team than just a month ago,” Mr. Gartland said a week after the completed rollout. “Sales ordering and reporting are better, and we have fewer issues that come into the office, so we have a happier administrative staff, too.”

Although still in its initial stages, the MiT system will help streamline production and control inventory costs as well as reduce waste and provide greater cus-



customer satisfaction in the long run, according to Mr. Gartland. It also will improve receivables collection and invoices.

“It has an overall major downstream effect, which is a big deal to our company and the baking industry in general,” he said.

Mark Maraj, MiT vice-president of sales, noted the company collaborates with bakeries to streamline their operations. “The goal is to eliminate software- and data-related issues so they can focus on selling and growing their businesses, and MiT has done just that,” he said. “MiT has not only provided Pan-O-Gold with a much-improved mobile software system, but it has also become the company’s trusted software technology and hardware partner that understands the baking industry.”

That type of relationship with vendors is something that’s very important to Howard (Robin) Alton III, president and CEO of the family-owned baking company.

“MiT Systems is more than our software provider,” he said. “It is a true technology partner that is an extension of our IT team.”

Pan-O-Gold’s new route accounting system provides greater options to create orders, boost sales and slash returns.

Pan-O-Gold