NiceLabel®

coop

Swiss food manufacturer uses NiceLabel to standardize labeling

Case Study

Solution: LMS Enterprise
Industry: Food & Beverage

Challenges
- Lack of standardization
- Heavy IT burden
- Hard-coded label formats
- Lack of version history

Solution
- NiceLabel LMS Enterprise
- Integrated with SAP ECC and SAP MII
- Label printing from Windows and Android hand terminals
- Unique allergen and nutrition functionality

Benefits
- Accurate, consistent labels
- No unauthorized label changes
- Full compliance with regional and regulatory requirements
- One standardized approach to labeling across all bakeries and production companies

Background

Coop, short for "cooperative", is the second-largest retailer in Switzerland and has 86,000 employees spread across Europe. Coop has a combination of retail stores (with 2,300 stores in Switzerland), wholesale and production companies located throughout Europe. The production companies process a wide variety of food and beverage products, including chocolate, bananas, grains, mineral water, wine, vinegar and baked goods. In 2017, the company's annual turnover was EUR 25 billion.

Coop has over 600 printers, including label printers and direct marking (CIJ) printers in their various production sites. They print a wide variety of labels, including article labels for sales items, which are placed on products. These labels contain allergen, ingredient and nutrition information. They also print packaging labels, containing ingredient, allergen and best before date information, and pallet labels.

Unique language requirements

Coop's Swiss-based operation places unique demands on their labeling software. They need to be able to print labeling information in three different languages. Based on the location of their bakeries (either in the Swiss-, German- or French-speaking region of the country), they need to be able to select the appropriate combination of languages, and print all information on the label in the proper format.

Challenges

❝ If someone printed something, no one was able to reproduce or store the data of what was printed at a particular point in time or in connection with a particular lot number. ❞

Peter Meier, Product Manager, Collamat AG

Multiple labeling systems led to lack of standardization

Prior to implementing NiceLabel, Coop had seven different software solutions for printing labels. Some of these were dedicated label printing software, and in other instances they printed directly from SAP (their ERP system) using SAPscript and SmartForms. The wide range of labeling software made it difficult to know who was responsible for label design. With so many different systems producing the labels, there was no consistency in label formatting. Multiple labeling systems also meant that they had to create the same label multiple times, to accommodate different systems and printers. It required a great deal of administration to maintain these labels and update them.

The multiple systems across multiple production sites also meant that there was no centralized storage. Everything was saved locally, which also increased the risk of inconsistencies in labeling.

Multiple systems meant heavy IT burden

The variety of software solutions made user training a challenge, as users had to be trained on all of the solutions in order to produce labels. The abundance of solutions also placed a burden on the IT department. In order to support so many systems, they had to spend quite a bit of time familiarizing themselves with each solution. It simply wasn't possible for the support team to know and understand all of the functionality on the various labeling platforms, meaning they couldn't provide satisfactory support to those using the systems. And when labels were printed directly from SAP, IT also had to assume the role of label designers, a process which was both costly and slow.

No label history made quality assurance challenging

Prior to NiceLabel, Coop had no production log providing an overview of the labels that were produced. "If someone printed something, no one was able to reproduce or store the data of what was printed at a particular point in time or in connection with a particular lot number," relates Peter Meier, Product Manager at long-term NiceLabel partner Collamat AG.

They had no versioning functionality, so if they opened a file to change a label, all previous versions of that label were lost. There were no approval workflows in place, which made quality assurance in connection with label changes a challenge.

The fragmented labeling landscape was not sustainable. In conjunction with the decision to consolidate production operations, Coop decided to implement a standardized label printing solution. The goal was to have labels that were universal and portable, so that they would get the same output regardless of the printer or resolution in question.
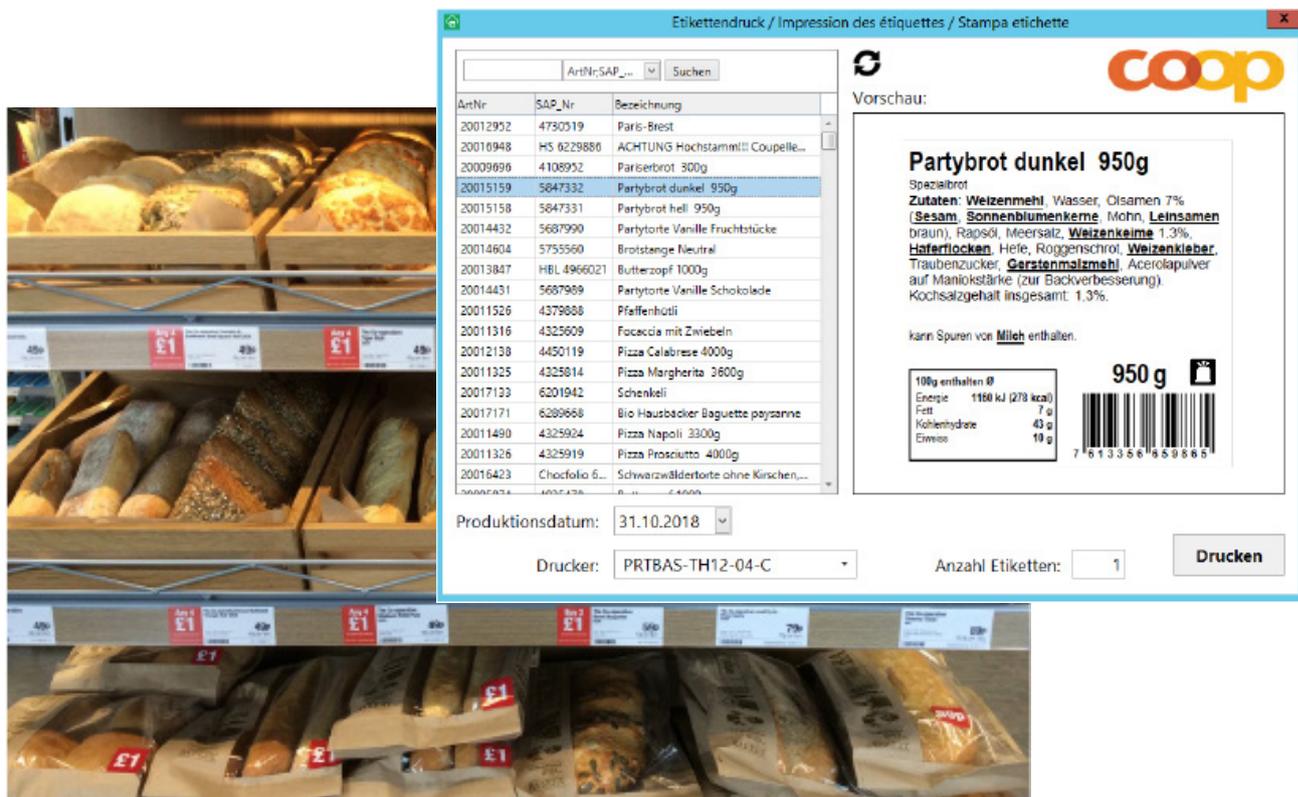
Solutions

One labeling platform works with all SAP systems

Coop has implemented NiceLabel's Label Management System, which works together with Coop's existing business systems. All material and order data is stored in SAP. The data is sent from the SAP ECC (ERP) system to SAP MII, which is Coop's manufacturing execution system (MES). All order information is then transferred from SAP MII to a central database.

All label templates are stored centrally in the NiceLabel Document Management System (DMS). Allergen and pricing information is currently stored in Excel spreadsheets, which are also stored centrally in the NiceLabel DMS.

In order to get the label data to the production sites, Coop has replicated the central database at each site. They also replicate the NiceLabel template database locally, so each production site can continue to produce labels, even if their connection to the central database is interrupted. These redundancy measures are key to ensuring continuous production at their manufacturing sites.

Users print labels using hand terminals (RF guns) that run on both Windows and Android software. They scan an order or article number, select the printer where the label should be printed, and the rest is handled by NiceLabel's integration system, which pieces all of the information together to make a complete label for printing.

Benefits

Accurate, consistent labels

"Before we had 10 different interfaces to different printing solutions," comments Didier Gremaud, Head of IT Processes ERP Production Companies at Coop. "Now we have one system, one single point of contact and one interface with NiceLabel." Having one system for all label printing saves Coop valuable production time and prevents product reworking. Prior to Nicelabel, there were times when Coop had to take labels back to production because the layout was incorrect. Rather than making multiple versions of label templates to match different printers, Coop can now use universal templates that maintain the correct, approved label format, regardless of the printer type or resolution.

"Before you could create a copy of a label and it looked different when it was printed, even though it was supposed to be the same label," comments Didier. "The good thing now is that we can make a preview of the label before we print it. We don't need to go to production to check and see how the label will look once it's printed."

Built-in approval workflows help prevent errors

NiceLabel also gives Coop centralized control of the label change and approval process. "Now we have defined workflows to make label changes. Only specified user groups can make changes, so we prevent unauthorized changes, resulting in a more secure change workflow. The whole process is simplified and much easier, and we can even set the time and date when we want the changes to be valid," Didier states.

Meeting regional and regulatory requirements

Coop also benefits from NiceLabel's unique allergen and nutrition functionality, something the company has developed specifically for the food and beverage industry. This functionality helps Coop manage allergen and nutrition information in multiple languages, and makes it possible for Coop to easily format the allergen information (e.g. displaying the information in underlined, boldface type) so that it stands out to the consumer.

Plans for future expansion

At the beginning of 2018, Coop began rolling out standardized label printing to its in-house bakeries as well. These are larger retail stores all over Switzerland where they bake on-site, producing bread and other baked goods. These stores need to print labels, and they previously used a locally-installed software to produce labels. Now, Coop can ensure consistent labeling in these stores as well, using the NiceLabel web printing system. Five locations have already implemented the NiceLabel web printing solution, with more stores scheduled for implementation over the coming months.

To learn more about NiceLabel's solutions for the food and beverage industry, visit www.nicelabel.com/food-beverage

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NiceLabel®

About the NiceLabel LMS
The NiceLabel LMS is the only 64-bit true-next-generation modular solution designed to address the complex labeling requirements of large and highly regulated organizations. The NiceLabel LMS and its unique "configure, don't code" approach delivers a new level of "print productivity". NiceLabel core technology is proven with hundreds of thousands of customers, making it the most robust enterprise labeling solution.

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