

“I’m not aware of any other application that has so many possibilities when creating configuration models”



Jens-Karsten Sievers HEAD OF GLOBAL IT

The Aebi Schmidt Group develops, manufactures and sells vehicles designed to clean roads and keep them clean in both winter and summer. The products are manufactured in the Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Switzerland and sold through 11 sales offices in Europe and an extensive dealer network worldwide. The products manufactured by the Aebi Schmidt Group are complex and offered in numerous variants, and this was the reason why the group went in search of a specialized product configurator. Together with Jens-Karsten Sievers (Head of Global IT), we review the decision to opt for Sofon, together with its implementation, and look ahead to the company’s future plans.

The Aebi Schmidt Group uses Sofon to cope with the complexity and variety of their products

COMPLEX PRODUCTS

The products offered by the Aebi Schmidt Group are complex. Sievers: “This complexity can mainly be attributed to the numerous variants that we offer. A salt spreader, for example, has around 100 variants and can consist of as many as 1,000 components. What’s more, machine options and variants differ from one country to another. For example, the weather conditions and traffic regulations are different in Italy, Germany and Sweden. This means that the options offered for a vehicle in Italy are not the same as for a vehicle intended for the German market. Our sales representatives had to have a great deal of knowledge of what was possible and what was not in relation to a vehicle to be able to configure it and produce correct quotations. This process had to be properly controlled.”

FROM EXCEL TO SOFON

Before Sofon, quotations within the Aebi Schmidt Group were produced using Excel, Word and custom applications. Sievers: “This was an expensive, time-consuming and not always logical process. We configured machines more or less using Excel spreadsheets. Usable data was copied from Excel to Word, where pictures and text were added manually. These activities were highly susceptible to errors. If adjustments had to be made within a quotation, the old quotation was retrieved. Often these changes were only made in Word and not in

Excel, which meant that the quotation history was lost. While we were able to produce quotations after some time, they did not yet have any bills of materials or routings with them. The order had to be configured once again in ERP from a production point of view to generate bills of materials and routings. We also used lists containing all possible parts, from which the unnecessary parts for building a machine were then removed. This was obviously extremely risky and took a great deal of time.” It was clear to the Aebi Schmidt Group that there was plenty of room for improvement within its quotation and order process.

SAP

The introduction of SAP had to make it possible for Aebi Schmidt to switch over to flow production. To this end a customer-specific routing needed to be entered into SAP for each order in addition to the customer-specific bill of materials. This proved to be impossible without a configurator. The Aebi Schmidt Group went in search of a configurator that would allow this and that could cope with the complexity and variety of its products. Sievers: “SAP is the primary ERP package within the Aebi Schmidt Group and SAP is capable of configuring products. We soon realized, however, that this configurator was unable to deal with the complexity of our products and could not live up to the expectations of our sales representatives to generate professional

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quotations. That’s when our Dutch division got in touch with Sofon. And I have to say that I’m not aware of any other application that has so many possibilities when creating configuration models. Nido our first office to start using Sofon soon found that Sofon is extremely intuitive and user-friendly. An interface with SAP was also quickly achieved. This meant that Sofon offered Nido the possibility of configuring machines, creating bills of materials and routings and transferring the order to SAP.”

POSITIVE EXPERIENCES

Following Nido’s positive experiences of using Sofon, it was decided that Sofon would become the configurator for the entire Aebi Schmidt Group. Sievers: “We set Sofon up in such a way that both our sales and our production department can work with it. The Sofon model was divided into two parts. The first of these is intended for sales only. Sales representatives can produce professional quotations on the basis of questions and answers. The second part – the production part – is intended solely for production. This means that a sales representative does not have to answer questions about production, and production employees do not have to answer questions in order to realize the quotation.”

ROLL-OUT

Once the models had been created, it was time to roll Sofon out to the other sales offices. Sievers: “All our 11 sales offices in Europe now use Sofon for quotation management. In addition, order management has already gone live at 6 of these sales offices. The others are currently

busy translating models and article data. Order management will soon go live there too in the next few months. The benefits of Sofon are already being enjoyed by the sales offices that have gone live and will soon be available to the whole of the Aebi Schmidt Group.”

RESULTS

In the meantime, the Aebi Schmidt Group has achieved some impressive results thanks to Sofon. Sievers: “Our sales offices are able to produce uniform and error-free quotations in 5 to 10 minutes for complex products that are also actually feasible. What’s more, manual work is no longer needed to realize bills of materials and routings. These customer-specific documents are created automatically and sent on to SAP. There the order for the factory is generated in the space of a few minutes. Now that quotations, bills of materials and routings are produced automatically, errors in production are also less likely. The whole process – from quotation to order – has also been shortened, which has resulted in a cost advantage.”

FUTURE PLANS

“At the moment we have not yet decided on a standard CRM package within the group. We are, however, looking at the Sofon Sales Organizer. The advantage of the Sales Organizer is that this application can operate as a single system with our configurator, the Sofon Proposal Organizer. In addition, we want to switch over to the new, certified interface between Sofon and SAP (PI Server). That will make life even easier.”

WHAT HAS THE AEBI SCHMIDT GROUP ACHIEVED USING SOFON?

- Product complexity can be easily managed
- Knowledge is made available in a structural manner
- Quotations, bills of materials and routings are no longer produced manually
- Intuitive and user-friendly sales/ product configurator
- Separate modelling parts for sales and production
- Uniform and error-free quotations within 5 to 10 minutes for complex products
- Feasible products; fewer recalls
- The whole process – from quotation to order – has been shortened, which has resulted in a cost advantage

