



“With Sofon we have access to up-to-date information, models and configurations every day”



Gerald Aigner
PROJECT MANAGER SOFON IMPLEMENTATION

Fronius develops, manufactures and sells products from three divisions: Welding Technology, Solar Electronics and Battery Charging Systems. It focuses on the transformation of energy with all its products. The family business is renowned in the market for its technological leadership and now has a workforce of 2,500 employees. This growth has made it extremely important for Fronius to make complex product knowledge available for its staff in a simple way. Sofon provided a welcome solution to this problem. Gerald Aigner (Project Manager Sofon Implementation) talks about the situation before and after Sofon.

Fronius reduces error percentage by safeguarding knowledge

LIMITS OF EXCEL

Fronius used to work with Excel and Word to configure products and generate quotations. Aigner: “The basis for product configuration was a price list in which dependencies were stored. From this we could conclude that opting for a component had certain consequences; it meant that other components could no longer be selected or there were other parts that had to be chosen. Over time we came up against the limits of what Excel could offer and it became complex to use; there were too many variants, exclusions and obligations. Our sales representatives could no longer see the woods for the trees.”

ERRORS

The number of errors being made in configurations kept increasing. Aigner: “To ensure the quality of our quotations, it was necessary for quotations and orders to be checked internally. This took a great deal of time, which meant that the people who were responsible for the controls – and therefore possessed all the product knowledge – became overburdened. In the meantime we had grown significantly as a company. New employees had to get to know our products

in order to be able to configure them. Due to the wide variety of products that we offer, this had become virtually impossible. It was clear that knowledge relating to the configurations had to be made available in a decentralized way.”

ACTION

An internal project team within Fronius carefully mapped out the problem. Aigner: “It was clear that we would not do well as an organization if we took no action; we needed a solution to make knowledge available. That same solution would then enable us to reduce the error percentage and the associated costs. We put a concept down on paper and used this as a basis for testing various suppliers. These suppliers offered software that – with our product portfolio – would quickly reach its limits, both functionally and in terms of content. Then Sofon came onto the scene.”

BROWSER VERSION

Sofon offered all the possibilities that Fronius was looking for. Aigner: “Sofon has also lived up to our expectations in practice. It was quick and easy to implement. We have



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put together a project team made up of employees from different departments. Their knowledge has been made available to our employees by means of a browser version of the Sofon software. We consciously opted for a browser version. As a company we are very international in terms of our activities and have numerous subsidiaries worldwide. Our IT is centralized, however, and this centralization also had to be ensured with the configuration software. That's why we decided not to install Sofon on PCs. Instead we are able to log in anywhere in the world to configure our products and generate quotations.”

TIME AND MONEY SAVED

By introducing Sofon, Fronius has been able to dramatically reduce the number of errors. Aigner: “Previously a lot of errors were made in configurations and quotations. However, we were able to stop these incorrect quotations being sent to the customer because we double-checked them. Thanks to Sofon, double-checking is no longer necessary. This has saved us a great deal of time and money. What's more, we are now able to respond more quickly to demand from the market. We have access to up-to-date information, models and configurations every day and can send quotations quickly to the customer.”

COMPLEX KNOWLEDGE EASILY AVAILABLE

Now that knowledge is made available it is easier for employees within Fronius to familiarize themselves with the product portfolio. Aigner: “Sofon itself is simple and quick to learn for new employees. In addition, they acquire knowledge of our own products quicker and are more productive at an earlier stage. Even employees who used the old method of product configuration and quotation generation are happy to work with Sofon. Sofon is simply faster and simpler than the old system. Not to mention that the configurations are virtually guaranteed to be correct too, something that we could not be certain about in the past. Now that all our products are in Sofon the benefits are becoming increasingly visible.”

PERFECT INTEGRATION WITH ERP

Fronius has an interface between Sofon and Baan. Aigner: “The interface works perfectly. Sofon takes care of the entire configuration and completes the bill of materials for the sales order in Baan. This ensures that our orders are error-free, too. In future we want to improve the quotations we generate by drawing them up in a more solution-oriented way – in the language of the customer. We are also keen for our dealers to work with Sofon. As you can see, to date I'm particularly pleased with our decision to opt for Sofon.”

WHAT HAS FRONIUS ACHIEVED USING SOFON?

- Access to information, models and configurations
- Error-free configurations and quotations
- Double-checking quotations is no longer necessary
- Knowledge is made available
- Quicker response to demand from the market
- Shortened training time new staff
- Seamless interface with Baan
- Sofon available worldwide for sales employees via the web
- Each sales representative can configure products 24 hours a day without support from head office
- Fronius has created 'preferred configurations'. These allow sales representatives to order a complete configuration directly without the need for any configuring.

