

“With Sofon, we can more quickly react to market demands and opportunities”



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 Els Havegheer FRONT OFFICE COORDINATOR

Picanol develops, manufactures and sells highly technical weaving machines to weaving mills worldwide. In addition to the complex machines, the weaving machine giant also offers clients additional products and services, such as training, upgrading kits, interchangeable parts and service contracts. Now that Sofon has been up and running for a few years, it has proved its ability to streamline Picanol's quotation and contract generation process. Katelijne Goethals (Sales Administration Manager), and Els Havegheer (Front Office Coordinator) reflect on the changes, value and efficiencies gained with the selection of Sofon.

Picanol steps ahead of competitors with Sofon

FASTER REACTION TO MARKET DEMANDS

Picanol wanted to quickly react and respond to changing demands in the market place. To achieve this, they decided to look for a sales support system. During the software selection process it became quickly clear that only Sofon was able to meet all of their requirements and so they decided to move ahead. Despite some initial skeptics, the implementation of Sofon went perfectly. Goethals tells us: “In the beginning we were afraid it would be impossible to get a grip on the complexity of our products. As we manufacture based on client specifications, we hardly ever make the exact same machines. We therefore were pleasantly surprised about Sofon's ability to handle configuration options and welcomed the standardization that was achieved in the process.” Havegheer adds: “We started with one machine in one language. After that we moved to define more machines and more languages quickly followed. In this way, we have gradually widened our use of Sofon with the help of various Business Units. Our sales staff can now configure products and generate both quotations and contracts based on an easy to use question-and-answer set-up. After the questions are answered, client-specific quotations and contracts are generated with predefined text. Apart from this, every quotation is accompanied by an internal calculation making it possible for management to make final price decisions in the very short term.”

NO MISTAKES

Because of Sofon, activities in Picanol's back office were reduced by 20%. Technologically trained staff, which used to spend their time preparing quotations, can now be freed to focus on other important tasks. The technical logic and the knowledge of machine technology – previously only known to the engineering staff – is now saved in Sofon. This makes it possible for both the sales staff and the people working in the commercial back office to offer products that are actually possible to produce. Goethals explains: “Sofon is very user-friendly. Employees are quickly trained in the use of the software and can quickly start producing quotations.” Havegheer adds: “Because of the rapid and continual evolution of our products, it is important that quotations and contracts are continuously configured according to the most up-to-date specifications and prices. This is why Sofon is updated every day by a team of maintenance staff that has experience in the commercial and technical back office. These people are experts in the areas of products and prices, but do not have any specific IT knowledge. Programming knowledge is not at all a requirement when working with Sofon.”



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WORLDWIDE USE

Picanol uses Sofon to limit central activities worldwide in favor of service to clients. Havegheer explains: “Of course we use Sofon at our head office in Ieper (Belgium), but our sales offices in Turkey, the United States, Brazil, China (including product organization), Italy and India also make use of Sofon. Our local sales people have Sofon on their laptops. The sales person can show all products, produce quotations and contracts straight away based on the wishes of clients, and can negotiate in detail about all potential possibilities. That includes all commercial conditions, such as financing, transport, delivery and payment conditions.” Goethals adds: “Involvement by our head office in Ieper is no longer necessary. This has led to a significant decrease in response time. Quotations and contracts that used to be studied for at least a week at the head office in Ieper can be taken care of by local sales staff in only a few hours. For us, this is of huge strategic importance. A purchasing decision comes with a long initiation phase in which, amongst other things, finances and licenses must be put in place. If we can react quickly and correctly in this phase, it is to our advantage. If necessary we can even adjust a quotation on location with the client. In this way we are able to be completely responsive to their needs.

UNIFORM QUOTATIONS IN THE CLIENT'S LANGUAGE

At the moment there are some 100 users of Sofon within Picanol worldwide. Goethals explains: “In order to give good service, you need to know the language and the culture of the country in question. This is why we prefer to work with local people in the markets that are strategic for us. With Sofon, quota-

tions and contracts are easily designed in the client's language: Chinese, Turkish, Italian, German, Spanish, Dutch, French and English. Documents in Chinese, Turkish and Italian are also accompanied by an English translation if needed. This last translation acts as an extra control. In this way, problems can be prevented when parties have not understood each other properly.” Thanks to Sofon, quotations and contracts are produced in the same way worldwide. “Previously, individual formulations and texts were used to define conditions. This is now taken care of according to the company norm. The great thing is that clients have told us in questionnaires that they really appreciate this. They think our quotations are very clear and well structured. And they are very happy with the response time of quotations. To me, this means we are constantly a step ahead of the competition.”

ENDLESS POSSIBILITIES

Picanol sees many more possibilities for Sofon. Havegheer explains: “We are constantly extending the use of Sofon. For example we discovered that Sofon was most suitable for the generation of other complex documents besides quotations and contracts, such as manuals for weaving machines. While the product configuration is created, Sofon simultaneously creates machine-specific manuals that we can then offer our clients before the product is manufactured. This is ideal preparation for the client because it helps ensure an effective and smooth installment.” Goethals continues: “I also see Sofon's visualization possibility giving us new possibilities for the future. And the evaluation of Sofon's CRM package is already scheduled. In short: we have plenty of plans for Sofon in our organization!”

WHAT DID PICANOL ACHIEVE WITH SOFON?

- Head start on competitors
- Being able to react more quickly to market demands
- Elimination of mistakes in quotations and contracts
- Shortening quotation and contract process from a week to a few hours
- Technical staff in back office is free to work on more valuable or needed areas of the business
- Back office efficiency improved by 20%
- Costs down drastically
- More autonomy for local sales organizations
- Quotations in the language of the client
- Generation of large range of documents including machine-specific manuals
- Calculation of both net price proposals for the client and internal cost and results, are taken care of automatically (including calculation of commissions, installation, transport, interest and other financial costs)

