



“Sofon was the only suitable tool found”

CEO Derk te Bokkel (right) and Sales Engineer Thomas Bischoff (left)

Clear view in the data jungle

Active worldwide with 470 employees

Established in 2004, the products of the TB&C Group – until that time, the outsert area was part of the Philips Group – include wind deflectors and sliding roof mechanics for the car industry, components for blood glucose meters, and optical units for laser measuring devices. Customers are supported throughout the entire supply chain, from development to the serial product.

Various sectors such as mechanics, wind protection, automotive, medicine, and industry trust this outsert technology from TB&C, which today has 470 employees. The production and development site is located in Herborn, Germany. The company has additional production sites in Arad, Romania, and in Puebla, Mexico. A branch in Suzhou, China, was opened in 2016.

FASTER, MORE FLEXIBLE, AND SAFER: TB&C USES SOFON TO PREPARE QUOTATIONS

Quotations for car manufacturers have laws of their own. They often include long contract terms, large quantities, and flexible volumes. A quotation also must be available quickly. But how can a quotation be drawn up that is valid for several years, while also considering every possible eventuality? The task is a complex one that permits no mistakes. Miscalculations can prove to be extremely expensive. The supplier TB&C was also faced with this challenge. The solution was provided by the quotation software from Sofon.

The data volume at TB&C had grown into a jungle, with hundreds of subfolders per project. “The data in our Excel-based calculation model had ballooned and was a complete mess for our employees,” says Sales Engineer Thomas Bischoff, thinking back on the time before the Sofon application. Searching for the appropriate data became detective work, consuming both time and money.

A GROWING COMPANY

As Thomas Bischoff emphasizes, the process to search for data started to take too much time and too much money, particularly regarding the development of TB&C. The company, which combines bending, pushing, and injection molding in one process with the outsert technology, is on a growth trajectory. From 2011 to 2016, sales more than doubled, as did its production area, while the staff grew from 250 to 470 employees globally. This type of growth requires a perfect data basis.

However, it was not just the large data volume that needed to be handled better. Mistakes in the quotations to car manufacturers were troublesome, because various calculation versions were used. If someone used an old template that did not contain up-to-date databases, the quotations contained errors as a result. Fatal errors, as it turned out, because quotations in the automotive industry become very risky given the complex and long-term contract terms.



“The entire workflow is mapped”

SAFE SYSTEM WANTED

Errors in quotation creation are punished with high costs because the quantities are high and the model cycles long, at seven to eight years. In the event of a miscalculation, suppliers such as TB&C bear the risks.

The software therefore had to be changed. But what system would simultaneously offer the necessary speed, safety, and flexibility? TB&C sought detailed information and ultimately found what they were looking for. “We had a close look at numerous database systems before we opted for Sofon,” says Thomas Bischoff, looking back. “None of the other systems meet our needs. It was only with Sofon’s calculation model that we found the suitable tool.”

COMPLETE WORKFLOW INTEGRATED

The introduction of a new system always involves transition issues for the employees of a company. For Sofon, numerous data sets had to be recorded in the implementation – unquestionably additional work. “For that reason, the reactions were initially mixed,” remembers Thomas Bischoff.

The sales engineer, for whom this was the first IT project, managed the transition phase to Sofon about a year ago. “

It takes time, of course, to develop the technical understanding for the new system.” This is a normal process that ultimately ended in an increasingly natural handling of the Sofon development environment. The end users must, of course, also be trained internally. This is particularly important for those users who do not handle the system on a daily basis. There is room for improvement on either side here.

The head office in Herborn was the first to switch to Sofon. Up to 20 employees have a CRM license, and five more have a calculation license. “Everyone is integrated, the entire workflow is mapped – from procurement to project management, technology, sales, and calculation through to the management.” Thanks to the new structure with Sofon, the large volume of internal e-mails are no longer required, which results in huge time savings.

SOLUTIONS DEVELOPED AT SHORT NOTICE

Sofon employees accompanied the switch. “The collaboration was fair and based on partnership,” Thomas Bischoff emphasizes. “This was never a problem when solutions had to be developed at short notice.”

Assembly without assembling

TB&C’s mission is to replace traditional metal and joining techniques with outsert technology. This will enable assembly without assembling, because the steps of bending, pushing, and injection molding are combined in a single process.

What makes the outsert technology so attractive is that it combines the benefits of the materials of steel and plastic to reduce or fully eliminate the downsides of the individual materials when used alone.

Using this technology, the baseboards can be made from the widest array of materials, such as metal, steel, aluminum, plastics such as Perspex, or from renewable raw materials such as flax. The baseboards can be combined with applications from technical plastics, thermoplasts, or elastomers. Even moving applications can be applied in a single process using injection molding.





“Data is fully entered and easier to find”

To implement the system, it turned out to be beneficial to make two employees available for the project. Here, it is advantageous to be skilled at IT or have a business IT background. For implementation at sites abroad, it is also important to develop a technical concept as to how these locations can be connected. Microsoft Azure is not a suitable solution for all companies and it is therefore necessary to think about server installation and transmission speed with the remote desktop and design solutions.

Since the implementation, the initially reserved responses of the employees to Sofon have now become positive. “People see the system as a benefit,” notes Thomas Bischoff. This is a positive vote for Sofon, and one that was made with good reason.

The Sofon solution reduces the work required to search for data, “thanks to the standardization in processes and structuring of data.” Sofon also made it possible to automate the processes in the workflow, offer creation, and cost breakdown. This resulted in a previously unimagined level of plausibility and time savings.

AVOIDING MISTAKES

As a result of the Sofon implementation, data chaos is a thing of the past. All employees now have the same level of knowledge and use precisely the same data to create quotations. The quotations are also clear to everyone. “Data is fully recorded and can be found more easily,” the sales engineer explains. Thanks to the time saved in quotation creation, more requests can be processed. This in turn increases efficiency and effectiveness. Additionally, Sofon also enables you to create quotations in numerous currencies.

Options and alternatives can also be offered very quickly. “What is crucial for the parts price in an overhead calculation, as is normal in the automotive industry, are above all batch sizes,” Thomas Bischoff emphasizes. The batch sizes can be variably adjusted in the calculation. Although this was already possible with Excel, “with Sofon, however, several variants can be created relatively easily by ‘copying’ the calculation alternatives. Then, only individual selection fields need to be changed, and an ‘alternative offer’ can be created at the push of a button,” explains Thomas Bischoff.

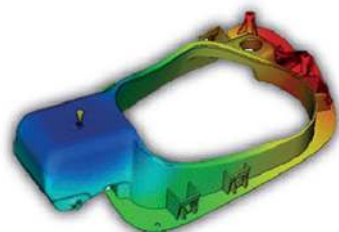
The major benefit of the Sofon solution is that the reference basis is always clearly defined, meaning that incorrect offers cannot be duplicated.

Does the error rate during quotation creation also decrease? Yes, if implausible data occurs in the calculation model, entries can be blocked with queries or noted with an indication by Sofon. Our model, for instance, asks whether the user is sure of the entry of a cycle time if it is below or over a threshold.” This query effectively helps avoid mistakes. This is particularly crucial with short time windows for offer creation, such as are found in the car industry, in particular.

AVOIDING TRANSFER ERRORS

This risk is now also a thing of the past: If older data sets are used for a new offer, Sofon can automatically update the data sets. This avoids transfer errors. Sofon generates the correct quotation as a PDF or Word document.

It is unimaginable today, but it was a reality before Sofon: queries could not be traced, which resulted in cumbersome searches by TB&C employees.





“Open-book policy easily possible today”

With Sofon, this problem has been resolved, because the system assigns query and offer numbers on a unique basis. “They can be searched in a targeted manner using filters,” explains Thomas Bischoff. This number can also be found in quotations and in the e-mail subject line. This is also helpful in the system selection for the calculation.

MORE AND MORE STANDARDS

TB&C also fulfils the increasing number of standards using Sofon, and not only because documents can now be found at all times. Sofon also generates automated e-mails in various workflow steps that inform the customer of the status of their query.

A must for car industry suppliers is the cost breakdown creation. Car manufacturers attach great importance to functionality and quality at best prices. The disclosure of the calculation, i.e. transparency, therefore plays a key role. This is enabled by means of a purchased interface at Sofon.

“The open-book policy is easily ensured today with well-documented offer documents.”

TB&C is also pleased with the responses of its customers to the change. “They consider us to be highly professional in this area – a leader,” reports CEO Derk te Bokkel. The company now also scores points with a contemporary image.

TAKING THE NEXT STEP TOGETHER

TB&C will soon take the next step. The production and development site in Herborn is working with the Sofon software and the Mexican production location in Puebla is already using the software for quotation creation and order entry in the system as the calculation basis. The location in Suzhou, China, is also set to follow in the short term.

The development of Sofon is not yet completed. “An awful lot is feasible. In theory, Sofon offers an extremely broad range of options with its potential. We would like to implement further requirements as needed,” says CEO Derk te Bokkel.

The next steps will be taken jointly with Sofon – but this will require further efforts, also on the part of Sofon. However, it is beneficial here that Sofon acts as an adviser

and is very agile as a smaller company, adds Thomas Bischoff.

“THE RIGHT CHOICE”

One aim that TB&C wants to implement with Sofon is the dashboard. The underlying information in the databases will be used for graphical analysis in an information system, from which the company can draw conclusions – buzzword Business Intelligence. An price comparison list of the suppliers is also on TB&C’s wish list. “There is room for improvement, which we want to achieve jointly,” says Thomas Bischoff, looking to the future.

TB&C still has other goals, “and Sofon is the right choice here,” emphasizes CEO Derk te Bokkel. Even if the software is not the cheapest, “only Sofon offers this overall package with its package of specific facilities.”

