Preactor’s Planning and Scheduling Applications in the Food Sector

Installed by more than 3,500 companies in 69 countries around the world.

Preactor in the Food Sector

Advanced planning and scheduling (APS) software such as Preactor is very commonly used in the food sector for a wide range of applications from long term strategic planning, medium term tactical planning and detailed scheduling. Each has its own requirements in terms of data and purpose.

Strategic Planning

Strategic planning uses a high level model to look at future requirements for equipment, labour and materials perhaps covering months and years ahead. Spreadsheets and demand planning software have traditionally been used for this type of activity but they often suffer from not having sufficient detail in terms of the real constraints of the system to provide accurate answers.

Tactical Planning

Tactical planning tools usually deal with a much shorter time scale, perhaps 15 to 30 days ahead. The model it uses will also depend on the type of product involved especially its shelf life.

Fresh food manufacturers will focus on materials availability and a demand dependent time horizon littered with uncertainty such as weather. For the first few days the load to plan will use a combination of customer orders, manufacturing orders already committed to, and an element of forecast demand. Further ahead in the planning horizon it may be dependent purely on forecast only which can be a problem when the process time is longer than the required delivery lead time. The planner will have the visibility of which production orders are used in which sales orders and identify potential shortages or shelf life problems.

Detailed Scheduling

At the scheduling level the process is modelled in more detail. The process routing is added to the orders and resources are defined as tanks, pipes, filters, packing lines and staff.

A typical application would start optimise the sequence of the packing orders to minimise changeover delays, then synchronise the plant to pull through the materials to meet the optimised packing sequence. This addresses the real world needs reflecting the daily demands on planners in the pressured environment of the International Food Industry. For example the planner can:-

- Schedule according to real time staff availability
- Schedule around ingredient shortages
- Group like products together
- Generate Schedules to minimise plant, tool, and line changeovers
- Re-schedule to reflect emergency orders & changes
- Schedule to margin targets, customer service levels and meet delivery
- Publish the schedule to Production screens immediately.
WHERE HAS PREACTOR BEEN USED IN THE FOOD SECTOR?

There are more than 100 reference sites where Preactor has been used in the Food processing sector.

BAKKAVOR

Among them are a number of sites within the Bakkavor Group. Kitchen Foods, based in Wigan, supplies a comprehensive range of added value vegetables and salad based products to the major multiple retailers and food service sector. Kitchen Foods’ production facilities comprise four main business units. Unit 1 processes all the bulk ingredients such as onion, carrot or potato for insertion into ready meals. This Unit also supplies bulk ingredients to the other business units. Unit 2 handles salads. Unit 3 processes mashed products and Unit 4 prepares products such as jacket potatoes. Darren Spanswick, Planning Manager, “The benefits so far have been more in terms of planning than production. The Planning Office can now see at any time in the day where the packing lines are up to and plan any changes accordingly.”

ARDO

Ardo UK Limited, has been a Kent based subsidiary of the Ardo Group since 1994 and supplies high quality frozen fruit and vegetables to over 400 key customers in the Retail and Food Services sector including Tesco, Sainsbury’s, Morrisons, Whitbread, Wetherspoons, and Aldi. The Belgian based, family run Ardo group is a key player in Europe with 14 processing units in 8 countries and has a turnover over £300 million.

When Preactor was installed, for the first time in the company’s history, a whole week’s plan could be issued to the production teams and this had a dramatic impact, as Production Planner Patricia Speakman elaborates, “No one had ever seen anything like it. Not only could everyone see at a glance what was happening and where, in the present, people could also see what lay ahead. This actually enabled the production staff to channel their experience into making positive suggestions about how to fine tune the schedule and brought them much more into the actual process while giving them increased independence and responsibility. In a very real way, Preactor has helped to create a very positive relationship between the planning and production sides of the business.”

The system has also brought levels of flexibility that were simply impossible before. Patricia again, “We now have the ability to run ‘What If’ scenarios which are invaluable should be a problem with a delivery or on a production line. We know instantly the impact of an event on the entire plan and from that use Preactor to judge how best to react.”

This ‘What If’ capacity also helps Ardo plan for customer promotions, advise customers on the best times for such promotions as well as providing critical wider business information when it comes to deciding whether to accept increased orders or not. The information from Preactor is even proving to be strategically important in helping Ardo plan for a major company expansion in the short-medium term.

“As a professional planner I need the right tools to do the job. Preactor is that tool and has proved itself to everyone with the entire company benefiting from the way it has helped us work more efficiently together. The production team especially have got so much out of it; we could not imagine doing our jobs now without it.”

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