Why is digitalisation essential for food processors?

In the digital era, it is no surprise that digitalisation is transforming the food industry. But what is behind the buzzwords, and what do they mean for your business?

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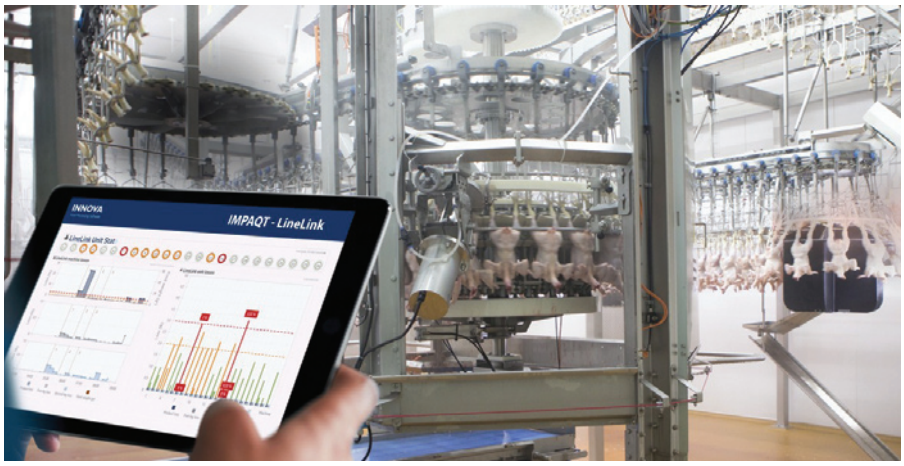
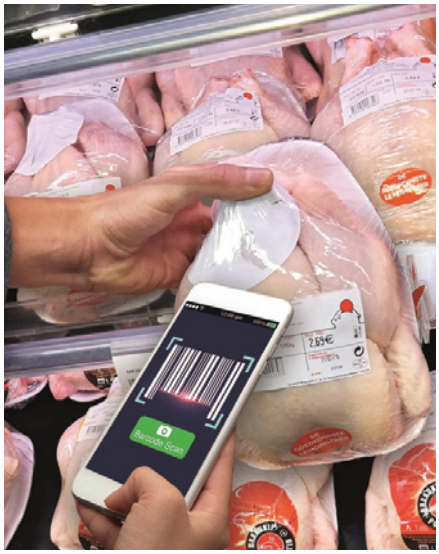


In the food industry, there are immense opportunities for digitalisation. Although progress has been underway for many years, the pandemic has dramatically accelerated the rate of change. Smart solutions have been key in responding to the rapidly changing environment, and most businesses have ramped up their investments accordingly.

Not just throwing technology at problems

Adopting new technology, for example by integrating food processing software across the production line, can give processors a competitive edge, whereas delaying necessary changes leaves them at risk of being left behind.

However, digital transformation does not mean impulsively throwing technology at problems. On the contrary, a successful digital journey requires a clear vision and purpose, supported by in-depth expertise. As Marel's Innova Sales Director René Kjaer advises: "Be well-prepared before embarking on digital transformation and do not underestimate it. Succeeding in this transformation takes clear objectives and well-thought-out planning."



Reap the rewards

The idea of digitalisation might seem intimidating, but the nature of the food industry – accustomed to constant change and the need to adapt – means that processors are ideally situated to take on the challenge and reap its rewards.

With a proper understanding of the company's goals and the technology that can support them, the digital journey can bring enormous benefits.

Digitalisation can have an enormous impact on the food processing industry, and it is crucial for every company to secure the full benefits of its own digital journey.

The power of data

Real-time data analysis supports business decisions. Raw data is a precious resource, but only if the tools are available to make sense of it. Indeed, most organisations collect enormous amounts of data, but very few make good use of it. In an industry where every detail counts, this is a missed opportunity for improvement.

Up-to-the-second

The good news is that food processors are becoming increasingly aware of the power of data-driven insights to optimise their use of raw materials, enhance food quality and safety, and guarantee traceability and support for continuous improvement.

Using advanced digital solutions and software platforms, processors receive up-to-the-second data on critical factors such as yield and throughput, use of raw materials, process statuses, overall equipment effectiveness (OEE), and much more. This allows managers and supervisors to make informed decisions at a moment's notice.

Reliable data analytics can highlight opportunities for improvement and discern potential issues in real time, enabling a processor to maximise productivity and troubleshoot issues before they become serious problems. Without this ability, errors can go undetected for long periods of time, leading to costly and potentially dangerous situations.

Overarching food production software should also provide a centralised source of information, so that all systems are connected and operate in harmony.

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Moreover, with the ability to automatically collect, analyse, contextualise, and convert production data into valuable insights, you can make optimisations that add up to huge cost savings and numerous other benefits.

A product's journey

Today, both consumers and regulatory bodies demand complete transparency and the highest food quality.

They want to know about every step of a product's journey: where all its ingredients came from, how it was made, its nutritional value, and if it was ethically sourced. This is why it is essential to have a digital system that records every step of a product's journey.

For the consumer in the supermarket, this means that detailed information should be included on every label, and the shopper can see all the information they need to make their selection.

This can increase the value of a well-labelled product and give it a competitive edge.

Traceability

Thorough data collection also supports traceability, which is vital to minimise the risks of contamination and costly product recalls that can damage a brand's reputation.

By the time a protein lands on a consumer's plate, it has undergone multiple steps of production, risking chemical, physical, and biological contamination along the way.

Without the benefit of digital data collection, tracing back through multiple steps to identify and address the issue is almost an impossible process. Fortunately, the right software will store this information, so that products can be traced instantly if needed.

In practical terms, this could mean the difference between a fast and easy resolution and a costly and embarrassing recall.

Automation is vital

The food industry has already invested heavily in automation, with far-reaching benefits across multiple levels of production.

Processors are under constant pressure to produce food in greater amounts and variety, and it is no secret that automated processes can perform tasks faster and more accurately than their manual counterparts.

Moreover, food safety concerns are greater than ever following the pandemic, and minimising human contact and human error in processing can have substantial benefits for food hygiene.

Labour shortages and worker engagement are another huge concern, especially as we enter a post-quarantine reality where fewer people are willing to return to on-site work doing repetitive and potentially dangerous tasks.

Automated technology therefore plays a pivotal role in filling this gap.

Food producers benefit immensely from lower labour costs and immunity to labour shortages, and employees benefit from safer work environments, more options for remote work, and more fulfilling roles.

Connecting processes

It is important to note that automation is not just about digitalising individual processes, rather it is a matter of connecting all automated processes across the entire company to create an integrated, centralised approach.

Fragmented automation is inefficient and can lead to lost opportunities to connect processes in a more effective way. It is therefore worth investing in a full production control system such as Marel's Innova, which can give a real-time overview of the entire enterprise.

A data-driven approach

What are the next steps in transformation? The process may seem frightening – digitalisation projects are a large undertaking, and digital transformation can completely alter the status quo. Choosing the right technological partner is crucial, to ensure service before, during, and after implementation.

Marel offers the full range of software solutions and support needed on a digital journey. A data-driven approach has been at the core of our business since our foundation in 1983, and we have decades of experience in guiding organisations on their digital journeys.

We offer a host of Innova Food Processing Software solutions backed by a global service network of experts. Innova is a powerful end-to-end solution that allows food processors to manage their factories by linking equipment and processes to function together as a single entity.

It ensures reliable data collection in a centralised system, providing real-time data insights, historical trends analysis reports, and full traceability throughout the production process. ■