Traceability through the supply chain

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Coding and marking is the way in which essential product and traceability information is displayed on products, labels and packaging.
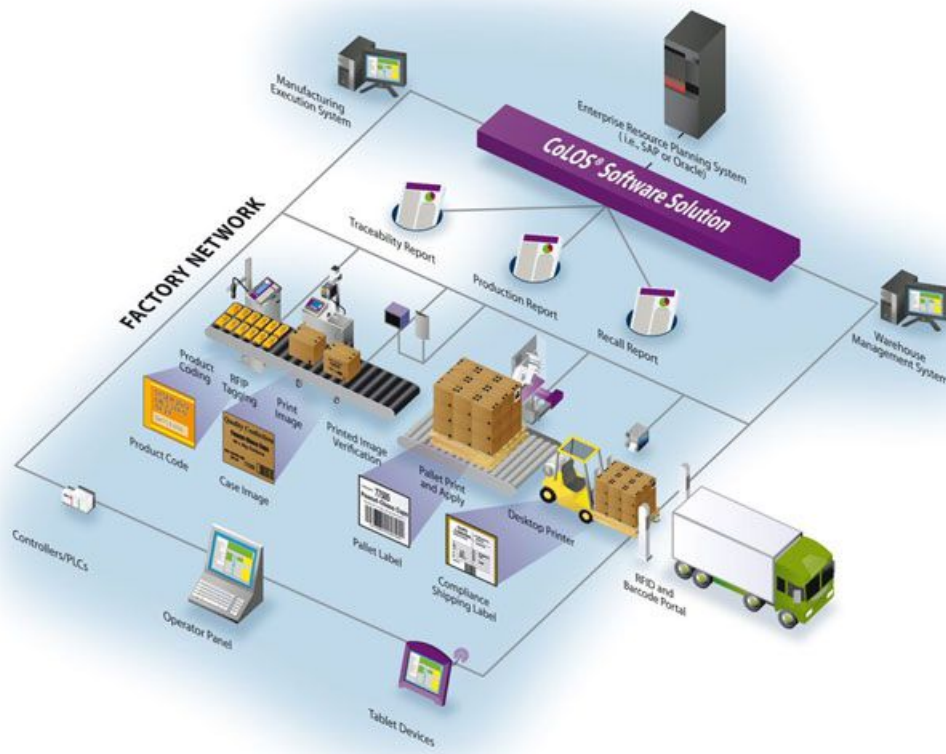
Even before the R146 food labelling regulations were introduced in 2012, all foodstuffs were already required to be marked with batch identification numbers. This was true, too, for the pharmaceutical and agrochemical sectors. Whatever goods are manufactured or produced, a batch number or code – such as a barcode, serialisation code, and expiry or 'best by' date – is required to mark products, labels and outer packaging.

"There are a number of reasons why brand owners need to incorporate marks or codes on their products or packaging," explains Pyrotec PackMark's general manager, Brandon Pearce. "To protect manufacturers and consumers, coding and marking ensures security throughout the supply chain. It also makes traceability possible, providing a record of reliability for products, and makes efficient stock control possible." For consumers, 'best by' and 'use by' dates confirm that the product is safe to consume. These markings also help consumers to derive the most value from their purchases and reduce food waste.

For coding and marking to be effective it needs to be error-free and, despite the automated machinery on today's production lines, human error is always a possibility. "This is where the advantages of centralised data management through integrated machinery networking come to the fore. Markem-Imaje manufactures a range of coding, marking and labelling equipment that's exclusively distributed in southern Africa by Pyrotec PackMark. In addition to its world-class equipment, Markem-Imaje's CoLOS software reduces human error through centralised data management that links, manages and operates all printers throughout a plant," explains Pearce.

"CoLOS offers real-time data by linking the production plan to individual end-of-line packing machines. The benefits of this are increased visibility of the productivity of each machine, more accurate scheduling, downtime information that lets operators identify the causes of machine errors, accurate performance reporting, and, importantly, automating coding information to avoid the risk of operator error."

Traditionally, batch and code data is manually entered into the system. However, if a code is incorrectly entered the whole line grinds to a halt while the root of the problem is investigated and rectified. This causes massive delays on the production line and can lead to further complications such as cross-contamination. Centralised data management ensures fast and accurate retrieval of production batch codes because the coding information is automated.

"CoLOS also offers impressive benefits in terms of reporting, and supervisors have access to the production status at any time. The system allows data to be extracted at any stage, which immediately provides a live update of any glitches in the system," Pearce maintains.

Packaging Line Traceability (PLT) solutions, such as CoLOS, are scalable and can transform coding and marking at any level of a line (units, trays, cases or pallets). Alternatively, it can be integrated into the complete packaging line from units to pallets.

"Correctly coded, marked and labelled products limit recalls, save money and time, protect consumers and manufacturers, discourage counterfeiting, and ensure advanced traceability throughout the entire supply chain," he concludes.

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