Salient Process Leverages Business Process Management to Help a Fortune 100 Warehouse Retailer Digitally Transform and Automate Its Non-Foods Quality Assurance Process

Salient Process
Your process. Our passion.

300% INCREASE
Number of audits they can perform

80% DECREASE
Test request processing time

86% DECREASE
Test request revision processing time

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The Client

A Fortune 100 Warehouse Retailer

Business Challenge

This Warehouse Retailer's non-foods quality assurance process (QA) was done via spreadsheets, phone, pdf reports, and email. There was no single process for quality assurance globally, thus each different country/ geography ("GEO") had variations of the process. This led to issues with compliance, continued usage Suppliers who should have been blacklisted, and lots of unnecessary rework.

The Solution

Salient Process led the digital business automation of a non-foods quality assurance process leveraging IBM Business Process Manager (BPM)

"I don't know how anyone knew what they were supposed to do previous to us standardizing our process on IBM BPM."

"By having a global standard process, with standard reports, we're literally reducing the decisions and reports for the whole company by thousands... This all adds up to saved dollars. It is a huge savings."

- Director
Non Foods Quality Assurance

A Risky Process

When this warehouse retailer purchases the items you see in their stores, they have to make sure these items are of the quality their customer base is used to, and also of the quality various governing bodies require. They work with their own company buyers, third-party quality assurance testers, and the suppliers themselves in a delicate dance to make sure the items you purchase are of a high enough quality. The quality assurance (QA) process is global and is highly complex. This process was previously done via email, spreadsheets, phone, access databases, and PDF reports. Because of this, things inevitably fell through the cracks and compliance was at risk.

There were disparate procedures and steps for performing QA, and things only got worse in the global picture. Over the previous decade many different off-the-shelf products and custom QA applications were deployed and tried, but with little to no success. The supplier watchlists and blacklists were still maintained manually, and by different geos. In many situations the company would continue to procure products from suppliers on the black/watch lists as buyers in other GEOs, or even the same GEO, would be in dark because of the manual nature of the black/watch lists.

These challenges with the previous process were putting the retailer at huge risk of non-compliance and fines, since if they continued to use a supplier who it was known produced sub-quality or non-compliant goods, the company could face sanctions, law suits, and what may be the worst fear for a global company: a viral video of a substandard product which puts the company in an extremely bad light.

Salient Results

By standardizing on one business process and leveraging IBM BPM as the overarching controller of this process, this retailer was able to create a definitive set of quality assurance procedures using a cloud-based platform. This eliminated manual steps in categorizing and storing reports, emails and audit trails. It reduced wait time, manual errors, and lag in tracking not just for the department staff, but also for external third-party test labs and auditors. The overall results were quite impressive. The Quality Assurance team was able to achieve an 80% reduction in test request processing time, an 86% reduction in the amount of time it took to do a revision of a test request, and a 300% increase in their audit capacity. Overall, they saved 7% of their total yearly person hours in their department due to this digital business transformation.

Because the information about test requests and result has been digitized via IBM BPM, and is now systematically stored in a database, the time spent manually looking for reports and storing them has been reduced 100%. Now, process participants have the data pushed to them as part of the process when they have a task to perform. Previously, it was a challenge just to find the right test request for an item as part of the quality assurance process. Now, it is available at the touch of a button.

With greatly improved efficiency, the QA department was able to keep up with the global growth and introduce testing programs in multiple new global locations. The process application gave them necessary visibility. Globally shared results provided the purchasing department with feedback on suppliers and manufacturers. Because the solution was cloud-based, the results could also easily and transparently be shared with suppliers and factories. Previously, a blacklisted supplier or factory could easily fall through the cracks and be used again due to lack of visibility. With their process now digitized, visibility makes data retrieval more acurate, making these types of mistakes less likely.

In certain parts of the world, there are legal requirements for documents and data regarding the QA of an item that have to be produced in as little as 24 hours to prove compliance. Before digitizing their process, this was a scramble drill for this retailer. Now, this is a walk in the park. The limitation is now much more dependent on network bandwidth rather than how much time it would take to search through a file repository. The information can be easily retrieved within seconds.

The centralized proces also makes training much easier, not only for the QA department, but also for external participants such as suppliers. Because process performance is tracked both at a process and task level, there is an unbiased recording of data, they can see where an employee is lagging in performance vs. their peers. The retailer can determine if a new employee is ready to have less supervision or will still require hand-holding. The process visibility and measurement allows for data based decisions with regard to employee performance.

The benefits for this retailer don't just stop with the powerful and ROI generating changes made to their process. Salient has enabled their team to carry the IBM BPM torch, so we are no longer needed there. We helped them standup a full IBM BPM Center of Excellence through strategic guidance, Boot Camps for their employees, and overall mentoring. At Salient, we like to say our job is to get fired for the best possible reason, which is the client is now mature enough in our technologies to move forward without us. Our job here is done.