



“VMI goes from engineer-to-order to configure-to-order”



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VMI Holland BV develops, produces, sells and installs machines for the rubber and tire industry. Most of VMI's machines are used to produce tires for automobiles, trucks and mining vehicles. VMI has branches in the Netherlands, Germany, North America, Russia and China. 99 percent of their prospects and clients are located outside the Netherlands. VMI wanted to provide their target group with better quality quotations, faster. And they have succeeded in this thanks to Sofon. We discuss results and future plans with Henk IJzerman (Manager of Project Department), Edwin Tinnevelt (Manager Project Engineering Standardization) and Tom Koetsier (Sales Configurator Application Administrator).

VMI makes faster, better quality quotations with Sofon

IMPOSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Before Sofon came into the picture, VMI did not work with a sales support system. “But that would definitely have been advisable”, says Henk IJzerman. “In the past, we sometimes offered impossible solutions. Or solutions that were possible to make were not known to our entire staff. Apart from that, we were very much dependent on technical expertise for quotations. This knowledge was in the heads of certain project leaders and engineers. If they were not present, no quotations could be made.” Tinnevelt adds: “Everyone used to make their ‘own’ quotations. They would cut and paste from old quotations and every quotation would look different. We wanted more uniformity in our quotations. But we also wanted to prevent earlier mistakes from being made again because of people cutting and pasting bits from old documents. Sometimes, a change would be made during production that would not be included in the next quotation.” VMI wanted to streamline this process that was so labor intensive and sensitive to errors.

PURCHASING SOFON

The primary reason for VMI to look for a sales support system was to improve the quotation process; to produce better quality quotations. IJzerman comments: “We looked at a number of configurators, but they were all too complex to maintain. During our search, we came into contact with Sofon. Among other things, we paid a reference visit to a Sofon client. When it became clear that Sofon met our demands, we decided to purchase the system.”

MAINTAINING AND STORING PRODUCT INFORMATION

Henk IJzerman, Edwin Tinnevelt and Tom Koetsier are the Sofon core group at VMI. They define the methodology; how VMI works with Sofon. VMI has a number of product groups and each product group has their own product platform in which Commerce, Budget and Engineering are involved. Each product platform brings their own knowledge to the table for the construction of the Sofon models, after which quotations and orders can be configured via a question and answer set up. Tom Koetsier takes care of the maintenance of Sofon models. Koetsier explains: “I started by bridging the gap between Commerce and Engineering: defining and maintaining product information. We store a lot of information concerning our machines and that information is constantly changing. The complexity of our machines makes complete maintenance of the product models in Sofon impossible. In order to make the maintenance of the Sofon models practical, we define the characteristics of the machine in Excel. This Excel information is maintained by our Engineering department. With one key stroke, Sofon incorporates the adjusted Excel pages, bringing the Sofon model up-to-date.”

STANDARDIZING

Three years ago, VMI was still working according to the engineer-to-order approach. Tinnevelt comments: “We used to engineer every order separately. Everyone thought that VMI clients only wanted to buy products that were designed especially for them and that



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standardization would not bring us any improvement. However, when we set up a standardization department that introduced new processes, we found that standardization could mean a lot to us and that we could work according to the principle of configure-to-order in many cases.”

Sofon played a big part in the switch to configure-to-order: communication between the various disciplines is defined and clear, and can now be easily maintained. IJzerman explains: “Standardization has many advantages for us. We now cooperate more intensively. This ensures that all our information is correct, and quickly and reliably available. Of course we do not only supply standard products. We still have the freedom to offer our clients specially designed products. This possibility must remain if we want to be able to meet our clients’ needs.”

FASTER QUOTING

VMI purchased Sofon at just the right time, as the company is growing quickly! By simplifying and speeding up the quotation process, Sofon also contributes to the handling of the growth in turnover. “The speed with which we can produce a quotation has improved”, says IJzerman. “A quotation for a not too complex product can be sent out within a few hours. In the past, this would take a few days. Or we would send a quotation out quickly, but there would be a big risk of mistakes or it would be incomplete. Previously, many small mistakes would be made in the sales process of relatively standard products (80-90%). Now even a less experienced person cannot put together a quotation that is incorrect or inconsistent. With Sofon, essential questions are asked on time and errors are precluded. That saves time. Complete new designs cannot be directly offered with Sofon. But as soon as we input the characteristics and possibilities of a machine in Sofon, a machine can be offered independently by Commerce.”

DOCUMENT GENERATION

Apart from generating quotations, Sofon is also used to generate other documents. IJzerman explains: “Based on the product configuration that Sofon provides, we produce a design document. A tool developed by VMI uses the Sofon configuration to produce a selection of correct drawings, bills of material and software. All the protracted calculating we used to do – regarding, for example, technical specifications and bills of material – is no longer necessary. This saves Commerce and Engineering a lot of work. And furthermore, the machines we sell are always possible to make.” Tinnevelt adds: “Sofon offers even more opportunities. We can use Sofon to generate commercial documents such as transport documents and job confirmations. We can also make specific engineering documents client-specific, for example, manuals. We do this with our own tools but based on the configuration. In this way, a client receives a specific manual only for his machine. Previously, clients would receive a complete manual of more than 1800 pages which was hard to read. Now we give our clients their specific manuals even before the machine itself is placed. This makes it possible for clients to train their personnel beforehand.”

PROFESSIONALIZING

VMI staff see the whole approach as a further professionalizing of their work. Repeat work is done by computer and there is more time to supply added value; this is important to the current staff and to the new people VMI needs. The chances of remaining successful increase because of this. And Sofon contributes to this. In the future, VMI wants to take Sofon to their clients on their laptops. IJzerman comments: “Speed can be the decisive factor in decision-making. So I can see us producing quotations on location for foreign clients, with the consequences of their choices immediately becoming clear.”

WHAT DID VMI ACHIEVE WITH SOFON?

- Contribution to the switch from engineer-to-order to configure-to-order
- Generating complete, uniform and error-free quotations
- Good, unequivocal specification of what the client has ordered
- More intensive cooperation between Commerce, Budget and Engineering
- More streamlined quotation process
- Knowledge stored in Sofon:
 - Knowledge is quickly shared
 - Less dependent on technical expertise
- Time saving; standard quotations can now be generated within a few hours instead of a few days
- Essential questions are asked in time, preventing later changes

See www.vmi-group.com for more information on VMI Holland BV.

