



Customer Profile



Company:

Pillsbury

Location:

Denison, Texas

Production Type:

Just-in-Time

of Employees:

240

Software Requirements:

- *Needed a solution to manage complex employee scheduling and accommodate union work rules.*
- *Wanted to schedule 100% of jobs, maintain high productivity, and increase employee satisfaction.*
- *Wanted the scheduler and Human Resources personnel to be able to focus on other vital tasks.*
- *Required a scalable tool that could grow with the company.*

The Need for a Solution

“Our (union) work rules were so complicated, I didn’t think any program could help with scheduling,” says Thelma Horton, retired scheduling manager at the Pillsbury Refrigerated Dough plant in Denison, Texas.

The Denison plant produces many popular Doughboy baked goods from cookies to Toaster Strudel. It runs four separate production lines, three shifts a day, all year long. Pillsbury’s dough plant is a just-in-time manufacturing operation. This means that the mix of Doughboy products typically changes from one shift to the next, forcing the production lines and job assignments to change frequently as well.

Its most valuable resource, its employees, includes over 240 members of the local Grain Millers Union. For years, scheduling could be done by only one person, someone with over fifteen years of experience. When assigning jobs to these workers, the Denison plant scheduler had to consider a multitude of factors.

“The scheduler had to know every single worker and every single job in the plant,” explains Horton. “He had to know their seniority, what jobs they preferred, if they were qualified, and who wanted time off. He had to know everything. This took a monumental effort. But it (the schedule) was never right. All we did was handle complaints.”

The work rules approved by the union incorporated many specific, detailed refinements. With so many overlapping conditions, it became increasingly difficult and time-consuming for the scheduler to build complete schedules.

Complex Requirements

The company realized that it needed something more powerful than a spreadsheet application to get the job done. It needed a user-friendly solution that could apply the work rules quickly and consistently, schedule absences, vacations, training, handle employee preferences, and altogether serve as a management tool. Pillsbury searched but did not find a qualified system to meet its needs.

That’s when it decided to work with Tugboat Software to develop an advanced, customized solution. The scheduling professionals at Tugboat listened to Pillsbury and focused on designing a complete, easy-to-use system. This application is known today as SOS, Schedule Optimizing Software.

Like many unions, the Grain Millers require that the scheduler assign a job to every able worker, in seniority order, for all available jobs. Other scheduling applications automatically assign about 80% of the jobs, but leave the remaining assignments, those with the most difficult conditions, up to the judgment of the Human Resources (HR) staff. And when HR has to reassign one person based on their qualifications or their preference for a particular job, “...they don’t get away with just moving one worker. The have to reschedule several people,” Horton says knowingly.



**Schedule Optimizing
Software**

Wanting a system that could handle 100% of its job assignments, Pillsbury required SOS to have the capacity and tracking ability to meet the company's scheduling demands. The system fills every job while creating a schedule that optimizes each worker's assignment according to their seniority, as well as their preferences for jobs and shift. It fills training requirements and allows sign-offs and floating holidays if the schedule has enough workers to run the plant. In Horton's words, it "... solves all the scheduling problems, down to the last person."

Expert Tracking

SOS contains both a rules engine that stores the work rules and a math engine that processes every possible job assignment for the schedule. Together, these form the working heart of the application. Tugboat Software customized the engine for Pillsbury, inserting each and every rule. The system is flexible enough that over time as the Union renegotiates and changes the rules, the engine can be modified to handle the new requirements. In fact, the rules engine is a repository for the "letter-of-the-law" in the union contract.

Using SOS, Pillsbury has found that because the system designates each job assignment strictly according to the work rules, it assigns jobs more fairly and objectively than any HR department could expect to achieve. As a result, the number of grievances at the plant has decreased dramatically, alleviating pressure on the HR staff.

Pillsbury has also discovered the benefits of the system's customized reports, particularly the Scheduling Audit Report. When creating a schedule, SOS tracks its entire decision history, listing every attempt that it makes to find the best possible assignment for every employee. This extensive tracking feature has helped Pillsbury significantly decrease employee grievances.

When a worker does have a complaint, they can review the Scheduling Audit Report. A careful look shows that each worker is not only getting a fair deal, they're getting the best possible assignment available in accordance with their seniority. When questions arise, this report makes it easy for HR to defend the system and build support for SOS throughout the workforce.

Employee Empowerment

Objective and accurate scheduling with the new system has contributed greatly to improving worker satisfaction at Pillsbury. Another reason for the boost in morale comes from the Employee Self-Service features in SOS. Using a kiosk with an ATM-style screen and keyboard, workers can interact directly with the system. This is where a mere buzz word, empowerment, takes on real meaning. Often called the "Hall System," the Self-Service features allow employees to enter their preferences for jobs and shifts. They can request vacation time and one-day holidays, volunteer for overtime, or just "sign-off" if they do not want to work, and the system will staff the plant without them.

"The improvement [in morale] has been phenomenal."

Workers can make refinements to their choices as often as they like, and many employees at Pillsbury use this system on a day-to-day basis.

After each interaction, the Hall System generates a printed receipt of the transaction for the employee. The Self-Service features have completely replaced the practice of workers slipping request notes under the HR office door. "The improvement (in morale) has been phenomenal," says Horton.

Future Growth

With optimized, automated schedules, increased productivity, improved employee tracking and increased worker satisfaction, Pillsbury has seen the rewards of its investment. Based on the success of the Denison plant, the company has certified SOS as an approved software solution and implemented the system in three of its other Refrigerated Dough facilities.

Pillsbury is also looking forward to expanding its system. Future versions of the software will enable workers to access scheduling information over the telephone. Similar to bank systems where customers can listen to account information, SOS will simplify and automate tasks for employees. They will be able to dial into the system, enter a PIN, and hear a recorded message that informs them of their daily job assignment.

With SOS and the expert services from Tugboat Software, the Pillsbury Denison plant and other Refrigerated Dough facilities feel confident that they can meet their unique needs and look forward to continued success.

"[SOS] solves all the scheduling problems down to the last job assignment."

For more information about the benefits of SOS, please contact:

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