Tracking Paint

Tips for choosing the right software for your coatings manufacturing needs

Print Email

By Trisha Richards | April 01, 2010

Choosing the right software for your coatings manufacturing needs can be reasonably compared to painting while blindfolded—you might apply the paint in some of the right areas, but it's pretty much guaranteed that you'll miss a few spots or likely extend your strokes a little further than you intended to.

Due to changing requirements for calculating and reporting things, like VOCs, HAPs, heavy metals and other substances of interest, as well as new requirements down the road for expanded MSDSs in line with international standards, software needs to be able to track and calculate all these substances and include new substances and calculations as required, explains Robert Chapman, President, Allcolour Paint Ltd., Oakville, ON.

'Going green' is just a catchy slogan anymore; it's a reality that is changing the way coatings manufacturers conduct business and are assessed. There is a growing demand for "eco-friendly" non-polluting products and ever more strict regulation of hazardous chemicals, says Chapman. "Software has to be able to analyze coatings formulas to track and report on their ingredients," he notes.

John Houltham, marketing and product manager for BatchMaster, Laguna Hills, CA, appreciates the ordeals that manufacturers contend with on a regular basis. Formulation today is a balance between three major factors: cost and availability of materials; regulatory compliance and the need to re-formulate to greener products; and profitability of end-products, including the need to re-formulate to produce market-leading products while remaining competitive. In fact, he cites challenges with "being able to design to cost as well as physical properties" as one of the main trials.

As the industry is aware, there is a long history of material shortages and cost fluctuations in the marketplace for coatings manufacturers, especially for petroleum-based materials. Houltham suggests that, if formulators were easily able to identify "problem formulas," like formulas with +/- 10% of critical ingredients where there are shortages in the supply market, they would "be able to analyze these to determine effectiveness and profitability of these formulas to determine whether to continue or discontinue the final products."

Coatings formulators need software that is specific to the processes of the manufacturing industry and that has their specific functionality fully integrated into the complete ERP system, notes Houltham. "This means the (research and development) department has full access to all the latest prices and availability of materials," he conduces.

In addition, complications can occur when multiple software systems, such as spreadsheets or custom software programs, are used within a coatings manufacturing business. When using multiple systems, you're working with different versions of the "truth" that can allow for errors and redundant data, says Jay Deakins, president of Deacom Inc., Wayne, PA, the producer of a simple ERP software solution. He describes many common instances of this occurrence, for instance, when "you're working with a new formula, but that data doesn't get to production properly, so you're product is made based on an old formula" or when "changes were made to a formula, but the batch ticket doesn't reflect those changes, for example, 100 lb of ethylene glycol is placed in a batch, instead of the determined 10 lbs."

According to Deakins, the best way to overcome data integrity issues is to look at a coatings manufacturing business holistically—all business processes, including formulation, regulatory reporting, inventory control, production, accounting, and purchasing, should be managed simply in one software system.

"By using an intuitive, single system, companies can not only preserve the accuracy of

their data, but build traceable process controls," he explains. "This means, for chemists developing a formula, they can have a specific set of steps that must be completed before the production and QC process." By having these steps in place and enforcing them, companies can ensure their process is performed correctly, reported correctly, and communicated to the customer correctly.

« Previous Article Next Article »

« Previous 1 2 3 Next »

About CMO | Contact CMO | Faq/Help | Advertise | Privacy Policy | Site Map | Terms & Conditions © 2008-2010 Rogers Publishing Limited

SUBSCRIBE to our Industrial Publications

ROGERS

continued from pg 1

Image: Deacon

Also keep in mind that, when making your purchase, certain functions of your coatings manufacturing software must be carefully considered. The "laboratory" functionality must be able to retain a library of all formulations (including previous revisions) that is searchable by rolled-up physical properties, Houltham points out. "This allows them to identify a close match which they can then adjust while viewing the physical properties as they make the adjustments."

You also need a good "what-if costing" facility, which will allow you make adjustments to the quantities or cost of materials and other cost components—such as packaging, labor and overhead—to manage the cost of end-products, Houltham adds. This facility must directly access the inventory costs in real time.

Other software functionalities to contemplate, according to Houltham, include quality assurance, which must also be fully integrated so that both the research and development and quality control departments can together manage the quality and regulatory compliance of the products they sell; a complete revision history, which must be maintained and have the ability to revert to a previous version if required; and an approvals process, which is "an absolute must so that no formula is released to production without it being fully checked and approved," he concludes.

Chapman advises that it is also essential that the software you chose has the capacity to evolve with the times. "Make sure the software can do everything you need it to today and that it is flexible enough to meet expanded requirements tomorrow," he warns. "Buy it from a vendor who has a track record and will still be here in five years."

One of the best ways to ultimately end up with the product you need is to do your research. Houltham recommends talking to others in the industry about what works for them, and then identifying a short list of software products applicable to your requirements. Another investigative tip he suggests is to search the internet for keywords such as "Coatings ERP Suppliers," "Batch processing software," and "MSDS." Looking for genuine process-manufacturing add-ons for the common ERP solutions, such as Microsoft Dynamics®, SAP, and Sage, will also be beneficial, he adds.

Finally, Deakins says, if you ask suppliers these top five questions when purchasing a business software system, you'll surely brush up on your software-purchasing savvy:

« Previous Article Next Article »

« Previous 1 2 3 Next »

DAILY NEWS more news...

Jun 14 - Strong European economic data pushes stock markets, commodities higher (Dollar-Markets)

Jun 14 - Most strikers at southern China plant return to work at Honda (AS-China-Labor-Honda)

Jun 14 - Vehicle sales slow for second straight month in April, StatsCan reports (StatsCan-New-Vehicles)

JOBS view jobs...

Search jobs Go Niche Network

POST JOBS

Calendar Poll Video

About CMO | Contact CMO | Faq/Help | Advertise | Privacy Policy | Site Map | Terms & Conditions © 2008-2010 Rogers Publishing Limited

continued from pg 2

(1) Can your software integrate all my business processes in one system?

(2) Does your system need to be customized?

(3) How does your system address the points of pain unique to me and my industry?

(4) Do you have customers like me in my industry?

(5) Is your price guaranteed?

Enter into your software purchase with both eyes open, blindfold off. Once you've completed your research and asked the right questions, your coatings manufacturing software purchases can be handled with a steady hand and the utmost ease.

www.batchmaster.com

www.deacom.net

www.allcolour.com

« Previous Article Next Article »

« Previous 1 2 3 Next »