

case study



Quality Refrigerated Services & LXE – Keeping Pork Fresh for Global Consumption

NOTE: LXE's parent company, EMS Technologies, was acquired by Honeywell in August 2011.

Quality Refrigerated Services, a family-owned refrigerated warehousing and food processing company, has made quality its number one priority since opening for business 21 years ago. Today, 100 employees in three facilities in Omaha, Nebraska; Spencer, Iowa; and

Worthington, Minnesota process and ship meat to numerous domestic and worldwide destinations.

Honeywell

The Worthington facility, acquired by Quality in December 2010, primarily handles fresh pork for JBS, the largest animal protein processor in the world. The 12 million-pound facility can handle 250,000 cases of meat. In the fall, approximately three million pounds of product or 60,000 cases, move in and out of the facility every week, with Quality providing all the inventory control and tracking to facilitate shipping of various products.

“A lot of product we handle is destined for export markets. Our customers look to us to provide excellent inventory and tracking to facilitate their shipments internationally. They need to utilize the entire animal to maintain a decent cost for the domestic supply,” says Mike Amundson, executive VP of Quality Refrigerated Services.

“Tracking food to its source has become a bigger and bigger issue with food safety,” he adds. The food safety focus is underscored by the number of foodborne disease outbreaks occurring from contaminated food. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that each year roughly one in six Americans (or 48 million people) get sick, 128,000 are hospitalized, and 3,000 die of foodborne diseases. In 2008 alone, 1,034 of these types of disease outbreaks were reported.

Cold Environment Key to Food Quality

All of Quality's food processing occurs in a cold environment – from the time product shows up on a refrigerated truck, to when it is unloaded on refrigerated docks and stored in a holding freezer at five degrees below zero, or a blast freezer at 35 degrees below zero.

“The less heat stress and the quicker the product is frozen, the better the quality,” says Amundson, noting that his employees all must work in coats, gloves and hats, “which makes everything else we do hard.”

“When you find something that works and you find a company that's responsive to the special needs you have in your industry, you stick with them. LXE's MX9 is the right tool for our environment.”

– Mike Amundson, Executive VP, Quality Refrigerated Services

To maintain the cold chain and to improve the productivity of staff, Quality Refrigerated decided to upgrade the Worthington facility's warehouse management system (WMS) to the same system used by the other Quality facilities, and began to look to replace its outmoded scanners, which were not cold-storage ready.

Quality Refrigerated turned to the industry leader for rugged, cold storage solutions – LXE. Quality also relied on service and support from LXE's long-term partner, AbeTech, a leading RFID and bar code solution provider based in Minnesota, three hours from the Worthington facility. AbeTech serviced Quality's existing network, assisting with the transition to the new WMS system, and facilitated a demo of LXE's MX9 CS hand-held in spring 2011.

Live MX9 Demo Seals Deal

Charlie Schmidt, AbeTech's senior account executive, recalled that connecting the MX9 to Quality's host computer took only 10 minutes during a live demo at the Worthington facility. “The demo showed that LXE equipment was going to work and that it operated in a pretty open environment from a wireless and wireless security standpoint.”

The results didn't surprise Schmidt, who has witnessed the quality of LXE products over a 10-year relationship. “They are our go-to partner for anything cold storage,” he says. “They've got best-in-class equipment; they've got great service and support; and the products themselves are very stable and proven. It's a repeatable solution.”

Based on the demo's success, Quality bought eight units for the Worthington facility. According to Amundson, the eight units operate like 16, since the facility runs in two and a half work shifts. He plans to add six MX9s in Omaha and Spencer, even though they are not RF-based facilities.

The MX9s feature an optimized keypad so operators don't have to double tap or triple tap function keys that are part of the new WMS system. The buttons are larger and work in the freezer without the screen defrosting over. The MX9's heaters prevent condensation, the most detrimental result of cold storage environments. The improved processing speed of the MX9's PXA 320 processor is comparable going from a “bicycle to a motorcycle,” Amundson adds.

“Our operators absolutely love the MX9s. It's a tool for them that has made their jobs easier because they don't have delays. In the past, they had to rely on paper or had to go out into an aisle or onto a dock area because they couldn't read the information or see it properly. Those are challenges that have gone away,” says Amundson.

Outstanding Service Before and After Installation

AbeTech oversaw the installation, and ensured that Quality Refrigerated staff got the most from the functionality of the MX9s. AbeTech monitors and supports the units remotely – a feature made possible because the units were running the Stay-Linked terminal emulation client which allows remote viewing and configuration of device sessions.

"I don't have to sit in 15-degree below zero temperature freezer to find out what's going on with the devices," says Schmidt, who never leaves his desk when logging onto Quality Refrigerated Services' server to make tweaks or to optimize the units.

Responsiveness Leads to Long-term Partnership

Looking forward, Amundson considers LXE and AbeTech long-term partners for Quality Refrigerated as he looks for new ways to leverage the MX9 in the company's three facilities. "We expect to see the same kind of increase in productivity and positive user feedback that we have experienced to date," he says.

"I would recommend the MX9 to other companies. When you find something that works and you find a company that's responsive to the special needs you have in your industry, you stick with them. The MX9 is the right tool for our environment."

Results

In six months, Quality Refrigerated has fully upgraded its newest cold-storage facility in Worthington, Minn., to a robust WMS system and equipped operators with the LXE MX9 CS hand-held, leading to:

- More productive workers who can perform inventory control faster and more accurately to facilitate shipment of meat for export
- Better traceability and assurance of food safety because the cold chain is maintained from truck to warehouse where it is readied for transit to its final destination
- Greater quality in overall service delivered to end customer, enhancing customer confidence and enhancing Quality's position in the refrigerated warehousing and food processing industry
- Opportunity to leverage LXE's rugged technology across Refrigerated Quality's three facilities to maximize efficiencies and operational capabilities.

"The LXE solution has helped us implement the changes we needed to implement to gain our customer's confidence with the inventory and location control, giving us a huge technological jump. The equipment has been excellent and AbeTech has been a great partner on the service and support side. We are excited about moving this product and utilizing it in our other two facilities," says Amundson.

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