

# The Video Advantage

By making food processing safer, remote video auditing is making food processors savvier

BY CHRISTINA KERLEY

**W**hile safety regulations and audit requirements at processing plants help ensure safe food, some plants are taking safety several steps further and enhancing their systems through remote video auditing (RVA).

A Web-based monitoring service, RVA leverages video data to assess, rate and audit performance at critical control points across an entire plant. The technology affords managers a real-time, multi-dimensional view of plant processes. The resulting data are opening doors to increased productivity, profits and promotional opportunities.

While remote video auditing is not a requirement, it does differentiate food processors that are monitoring themselves in order to achieve a higher standard of safety and compliance.

## Internal and External Improvements

The RVA system is structured to yield both internal and external improvements. Internally, the data serves as a record of the plant's safety and productivity levels, alerting management to needed improvements and operational achievements. Externally, the third-party certifications and Web-based video access to a processing plant can be used by processors as a core component of their sales and marketing programs.

Adam Aronson, CEO of Arrowsight, Inc. (New York, N.Y.), developer of RVA services, sheds light on the advantages of the application.

"RVA serves many purposes and satisfies numerous requirements," he says. "While safety is priority one, protecting assets by ensuring efficiency and productivity are paramount to a plant's viability. More compelling still are the third-party certifications and high-performance track records that RVA delivers."

Asked about RVA's core value for food processors, Aronson says processors can use the performance records generated by the services as a marketing tool that translates into a competitive advantage. "We call it the video advantage," he adds.

But the proof lies with plant managers. Take Mike Rozzano, general manager of meat-processing company Plumrose USA, and his experience with RVA, for instance.

"The audit reports enable us to make improvements to specific areas in the processing chain," he says. "We are able to use those reports to improve corporate morale and leverage the data in marketing, pointing to findings that support our plant exceeding food safety standards."

RVA findings have also helped Plumrose achieve higher serv-

ice standards with the plant citing significant yield improvements and ROI on the costs of the service.

While relatively new to the industry, RVA reports are quickly becoming an industry benchmark with suppliers, buyers and sales agents alike.

"Sales agents, acting on behalf of the customer, are viewing RVA as a critical differentiator in deciding which suppliers maintain the highest levels of safety, day in and day out," Aronson says. "They view it as the right thing to do for their customers and end consumers."

So as serendipity would have it, RVA is not only making food processors better businesses, it's making them more attractive to do business with.

## Data That Delivers

Metrics are the Holy Grail for marketers. Be it the safest SUV on the market, the highest-rated sitcom or a fast-food restaurant serving more than a billion burgers annually, metrics are both the truth and a testament of product value.

But unless data is collected and results validated, companies are vulnerable. So it is a matter of what is being monitored, how often and by whom.

RVA auditors point to a myriad of aptly-named critical control points in the processing continuum. These points range from top-level statistics on the humane handling of livestock and plant cleanliness to detailed data regarding pickle-juice preparation and meat-packing processes. Since RVA is "always on," the 24/7 auditing methodology ensures that safety, compliance and quality guidelines are monitored and met each and every time.

Plumrose's plants received a recipe checklist for pickle-juice preparation outlining requisite ingredients, amounts delivered, productivity and profits, as the wrong recipe can result in several hours of wasted manpower, and several thousand pounds of wasted meat.

"With reporting cycles running daily, weekly and monthly, managers can check progress at any given point and compare productivity between reporting periods," says Arnold Mikelberg, former president of both ConAgra Refrigerated Food's Specialty Processed Meat division and Armour Swift-Eckrich. "The technology not only maintains best practices, it makes better businesses."

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## Giant Step

Between measuring performance and marketing the findings, the service marks a big step forward for the industry.

“RVA is a big step forward in animal welfare and animal handling practices as we can manage the areas we measure,” says Dr. Temple Grandin, owner of Grandin Livestock Handling systems, an advocate in animal welfare and animal handling practices. If you don’t measure something, it tends to slide back bad—with and you don’t even realize it is happening.”

Instead once a year, Grandin continued, snapshots are provided year round. RVA’s “sweet-spot,” she adds, appears to be high-level auditing matched with low-level interference with business operations. By looking through RVA’s lens, processors are provided both a picture of current plant operations and a glimpse into the future of food processing. The processors embracing this new technology are setting new safety precedents and pioneering a new marketing model. ■

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