GS1 US

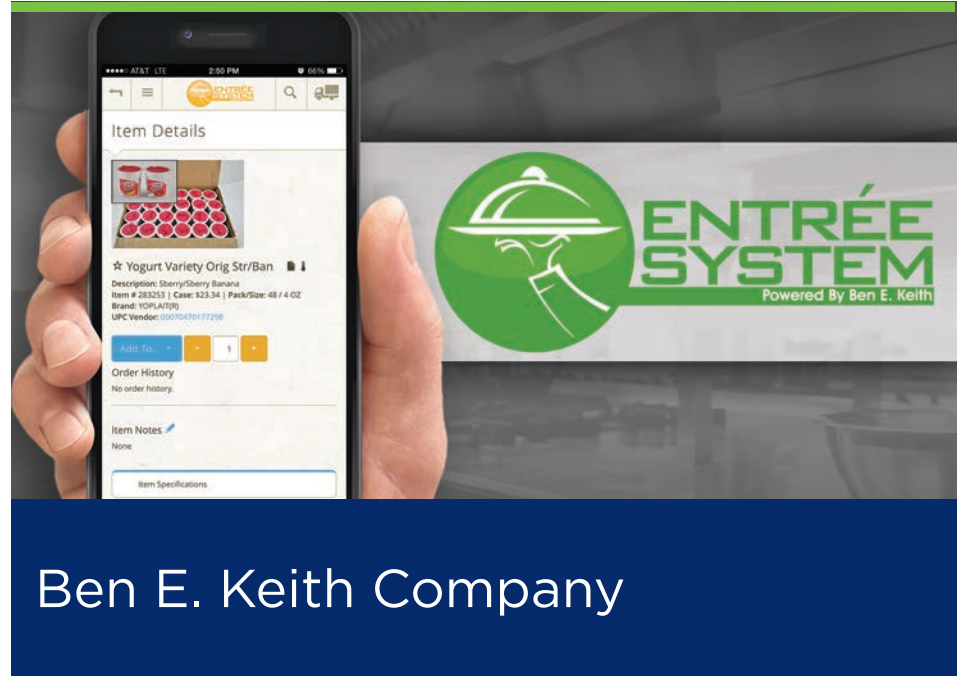## THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE OF BUSINESS

Ben E. Keith Company

Southwest food distributor uses quality data as entrée to growth

CHALLENGE

Texas food distributor, Ben E. Keith Company, serves 18,000 foodservice operators in 11 states throughout the Southwest. When automating operations, the company knew that complete and accurate data was a critical component to effectively transform processes, making every part of its business more efficient and responsive to customers.

SOLUTION

Ben E. Keith launched a quality data program that enables manufacturers to publish—via data pools—core data attributes, marketing and nutritional information, and images that are then synchronized with the company's system via the Global Data Synchronization Network™ (GDSN®). *Entrée*, the company's e-commerce application, delivers this complete, up-to-date product information to customer desktops or mobile devices—allowing them to research products, place orders, check on deliveries, and much more.

BENEFITS

Ben E. Keith manufacturers that supply some 80 percent of all products, are participating in the company's quality data program. With easy access to better product data, Ben E. Keith sales reps can more easily sell and serve customers for increased sales. All aspects of the company's operations, from purchasing to logistics, are using quality data to increase efficiencies and improve customer service.

"With our Entrée application and quality data, our customers will be able to easily research products, build wish lists and place orders—anytime and anywhere."

— DAVID WERNER, Vice President of Marketing, Ben E. Keith Company

Founded in 1906, the Ben E. Keith Company offers more than 25,000 products to its 18,000 customers and has grown to be one of the largest foodservice distributors with eight divisions throughout the Southwest, including the Winn Meat Company, its private protein processing company, located in Dallas.

"Using technology has always been an important part of our growth strategy," says Steve Reiling, director of Non-Foods Purchasing and Supply Chain Initiatives. "As we automate our supply chain, having quality data is not a 'nice-to-have,' it's imperative."

"And we're now extending the value of automated, quality data directly to our sales reps and customers," adds David Werner, vice president of Marketing. "Delivering more complete product information to our customers—like ingredients and allergens—is a priority."

Attention to quality data starts at the top for Ben E. Keith. President Mike Roach was one of the founding members of the Foodservice GS1 US Standards Initiative. When Ben E. Keith officially launched its quality data initiative in 2009, it didn't take long to create a cross-business team.

"Purchasing, sales, marketing, operations and accounting—they all gave us input about how product data could be leveraged in their parts of the business," advises Mark Pringle, eBusiness systems manager. "We also partnered with some of our founding manufacturers to help put in place the new quality data processes."

Today, approximately 335 of Ben E. Keith manufacturers that supply about 80 percent of the products are publishing Phase 1 core data attributes and Phase 2 marketing and nutritional attributes via data pools.

All data is then synchronized and shared with the Ben E. Keith system via the GDSN. Upon receipt, the data attributes are validated using the company's master item database, and then integrated into Ben E. Keith's back-end systems for updating all data attributes used throughout the company's different departments.

"If dimensions have changed for a particular product, our distribution centers will know and can quickly make adjustments for warehousing and shipping," says Reiling. "With accurate, up-to-date data we can optimize truck loads, maximize freight costs and be more competitive in the marketplace. That's the power of automated quality data."

> **"With accurate, up-to-date data we can optimize truck loads, maximize freight costs and be more competitive in the marketplace. That's the power of automated quality data."**
>
> — **STEVE REILING**, Director of Non-Foods Purchasing and Supply Chain Initiatives, Ben E. Keith Company

Pringle advises that updated data is "locked down," in accordance with the company's data governance model. "Ongoing data management is critical for data integrity," says Pringle. "Ensuring that proper controls are in place needs to be part of any quality data program."

Ben E. Keith is also putting the power of automated quality data into the hands of its customers and sales reps. With its *Entrée* application, Ben E. Keith is delivering e-commerce to any computer, laptop or mobile device like a smartphone or tablet. "With our *Entrée* application and quality data, our customers will be able to easily research products, build wish lists and place orders—anytime and anywhere," says Werner. "We're very excited about the possibilities it opens up for customers and employees, who may be on the move, to keep them better informed and productive."

For those manufacturers providing complete product information and images, Ben E. Keith predicts increased sales since sales reps tend to recommend products more often when data is available. "Our reps can confidently sell a product and answer questions," says Werner. "I believe this could be a watershed year for more and more manufacturers joining the program. There is no downside in the value equation."

Pringle adds, "In the last couple of years, I've noticed that the number of operators getting involved in our initiative has really grown. It's a sign of the times where the end-users or 'consumers' of data are driving demand."

To learn more about Ben E. Keith Company, visit www.benekeith.com.

To learn more about the Foodservice GS1 US Standards Initiative, visit www.gs1us.org/foodservice.