Cheers to Beautiful Friendships!

By Tim Mabley, Director of Operations

One of the most memorable closing lines in movie history occurs in the movie *Casablanca*. Claude Raines and Humphrey Bogart walk off into the fog and Bogie says, "I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship." As a practical matter, this would have been the best borrowed line for the day that Aspen Systems and Koch Foods entered into partnership. The incredible growth of Koch Foods since that time is one of the greatest success stories that

KOCH FOODS
America's Chicken Specialist

Aspen Systems has been involved with. When considering partnerships and providing solutions, Koch Foods is an epic tale in Aspen's history.

Koch Foods traces their humble beginnings to 1985, when they were a one-room chicken deboning and cutting operation with 13 employees. In 1993, when Aspen and Koch joined forces, Koch had grown to a thirty-five million dollar per year operation. Both

companies had plans to grow and gain status within their respective industries. The management at Koch determined that, in order to achieve their goals, they needed to invest in technology that would provide them information to help mold their decision making. The decision to purchase a computer system instead of upgraded deboning equipment was widely debated. Aspen employees recall Koch's owner, Joe Grendys, giving them the third degree on this subject.

Eventually, Joe was willing to acknowledge the computer systems' benefits as Koch Foods became one of the leading users of Aspen Systems' legacy Phoenix Food System (PFS). In response to Koch CFO Mark Kaminsky's desire to get more information out of the system, Aspen employed a full-time programmer who would work solely on projects for Koch. Stewart Ward, Koch's Director of MIS, assumed responsiblity for coordinating the further development. Stewart would provide the project specifications that Aspen would translate into programming customizations. This partnership would allow real world solutions to become a reality and Koch was able to realize substantial operational cost savings.

While all of this was going on, Koch was growing by leaps and bounds. Through strategic acquisitions, Koch had expanded its organization beyond its Illinois borders, purchasing facilities in Georgia, Tennessee, Ohio, Alabama and Mississippi. With the purchase of each new company, new databases needed to be set up and data had to be converted. Both organizations became so adept at this process that following Koch's acquisition of two Tyson Foods' facilities, they were able to accomplish the entire conversion within an eight-week period of time. This was quite an accomplishment when you consider that every piece of technology in these facilities needed to be replaced and the two complexes housed approximately 1500 employees with more than 80 users of the software. The final switch over began on a Friday and they went live on the following Monday.

When Aspen Systems released Canopy, Koch was growing so fast that changing platforms from PFS to Canopy was not even a consideration. As time went on, Koch decided that it was now necessary to devote the resources to upgrading their ERP software. Although PFS had served them well, it was time to address the daunting task of replacing technology. In spite of

the great relationship between both organizations, Koch made the decision to go out and research all of their options. **After all, Koch was no longer the thirty-five million dollar company they were when they first partnered with Aspen; they were now exceeding two billion dollars annually in sales.**

Koch Foods in 1985

Stewart spent the better part of a year researching software solutions often associated with large companies; these options included Oracle, Microsoft Dynamics, and Epicor. He also reviewed Canopy, which was a proven product by this time with well over one hundred successful installations across the United

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States and Canada. **After numerous hours of due diligence, the decision was made that Canopy and Aspen Systems was the right choice for Koch.** According to Stewart, this decision was primarily based on the following factors: the already proven relationship with

Aspen Systems, the ability to move years of data from PFS to Canopy using Aspen's conversion utilities, the cost to value ratio comparing Canopy's cost to the cost of the other software products, and the fact that Koch could leverage the line of business rules developed over the years in PFS directly into Canopy.

Once the decision was made, many hours were spent creating a tactical plan to carry out the migration. Keeping the project on schedule required meticulous preparations, with numerous hours of testing, and refining of procedures. The project has progressed on schedule and is expected to be completed in 2012. The effort has truly been a team approach with dedication from both sides ensuring the success.

Aspen Systems takes great pride in its role of providing technology solutions for Koch Foods. They are a true American Success Tale. Their success has been found in providing high quality food products that bring value through competitive prices and distributing them with outstanding customer service. This philosophy has served them well, as today they have grown to be the fourth largest chicken producer in the United States, processing more than two million birds a day. Their product line includes value added prepared, gourmet, specialty, frozen and controlled vacuum packaged chicken products. They are a leader in technology from the production floor to the executive suites.

Aspen Systems and Koch Foods have proven through commitment and perseverance that the technology solutions they have teamed up to develop are scalable and continue to stay relevant in a rapidly changing Food Industry. It has been a partnership that both organizations have used as their model for customer/vendor relationships. In short, it has been "a beautiful friendship."