

Data enhancing the supply chain

An 18-month project for fresh produce business Costa Group, with tech company Escavox, has shifted its supply chain to the “next level”, including its premium avocado brand, Lovacado.

COSTA Group is one of Australia’s biggest vertically integrated fresh produce businesses. It is a major grower, marketer and supplier of avocados, mushrooms, berries, citrus and glasshouse tomatoes.

Technological advancements, particularly in data analytics, has started to reveal information previously unavailable to food suppliers. For Costa Group, intent on being a data led business, it helped make its decision to invest more than \$1 million on upgrades to its premium avocado cool chain facilities.

This has led to Costa Group contracting the analytical services of Australian technology company Escavox over the last 18 months in a bid to deliver ‘next-level’ supply chain performance, specifically aimed at enhancing the offer of

its premium Lovacado avocado brand to consumers in Australia and overseas.

“Quality is a fundamental value proposition to Costa Group, and we wanted to align with a technology provider that would support our desire to have the freshest, best quality produce on the shelf,” says the company’s avocado and banana category general manager Shanon Williams.

“To do so, we needed a supplier who understood fresh produce and the challenges of supply chains, but also appreciated the factors that differentiate a great customer experience from a poor one.

“Escavox had a strong presence in this space and it made sense to partner up.”

Established in 2018, Escavox uses smart technology to gain unique insights into the



performance of domestic and international supply chains. This is assisting businesses such as Costa Group to monitor and optimise the performance of their cold chains.

Escavox trackers deployed with the product collect automated, independent and objective data and report in real-time on the conditions to which the product is exposed as it travels from farm to retail shelf.

This primary data is then analysed against product specific criteria and the resulting information provides the necessary intelligence that allows supply chain operators to make better informed decisions about the optimal management of product and investments in the cold chain.

Costa Group’s work with Escavox to trial real-time, end-to-end cool chain tracking began in March 2019, initially in avocados and bananas, and now extending to tomatoes.

“Escavox offers live temperature, time and location movement tracking of every consignment from point of harvest through to customer,” Williams says.

“In a market that continues to evolve, we felt Escavox were leaders in this area with strong experience in the markets we were targeting.

“Since our first trials over 18

months ago, Costa Group has assisted in the evolution of the system including trialling several breakthrough options, including on-farm harvest loops, live location, end-to-end tracking into retail stores as well as several other developments for future expansion.”

Williams says the breadth of the Escavox system is far more advanced compared to others they considered at the time, describing their offering as “much more than just a data logger”.

The Escavox service provided to Costa Group has included:

- live view of temperature and location of fruit at any time;
- live mapping of product location overlaid with colour-coding of temperature indicators (heat maps);
- proactive alerts for temperature deviations with information able to be also sorted within the journeys by “legs” with temperature bands for each leg, colour specifications, and dwell time in each leg; and
- analysis of historical data to identify performance trends, incidence and nature of sub-optimal tracks and systemic weaknesses in cool-chain integrity.

Williams says: “Overall, our produce receives a ‘travel score’, which we see as a predictor of fruit quality linked to the



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MAIN: Costa Group avocado and banana category general manager Shanon Williams says the Lovacado system is an industry first.



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improvements that continues to enhance the quality of avocado on offer,” he says.

“Real-time data is critical to assessing and making decisions so that only the best Lovacados hit supermarket shelves.

“It’s allowed us to understand our supply chain in much greater detail and invest significantly into our facilities.

“We have also made several changes to key points of the process such as cooling times and deciding which fruit we deem meets our Lovacado standard and suitable for retailer shelves.”

Escavox chief operating officer Nicola Sanderson says reducing waste and improving the quality of fresh produce with better supply chain management are the technology company’s key drivers.

“Costa practice what they preach and proactively use the data to drive waste reduction and maximise quality for their customers,” says Sanderson.

“To see improving trends over time is very rewarding for both of us and we continue to work alongside Costa, building features that are of value to them and ultimately the entire fresh produce industry.”

The end-result of the Costa Group-Escavox partnership, Williams says, will be a simple, cut-through message for consumers underpinned by industry-leading technology and innovation.

“We will be able to tell a consumer where the fruit was harvested, how it arrived in store and how it was handled along the way. This will be an industry first,” Williams says.

“We’re already on our way towards achieving industry-leading traceability and developing processes supported by data that will improve quality for the consumer and ensure a customer eating Lovacado has a trusted high-quality experience every time.” *

consumer experience.

“Having this information enables us to make real-time decisions that enhances a consumer’s experience with our avocados and continues to improve the general quality of avocados on shelf.”

Williams says current developments include working with Escavox on the integration of the tracking data with Costa Group’s own internal logistics data and integrating with algorithm technology to other projects of the category that will

enable them to predict quality for the consumer.

Before the business reaches that horizon, Williams says, Costa Avocados has focused on adjusting and upgrading the links within their own extensive supply chain based on the insights from Escavox.

“It has provided us with accurate data to allow us to work collaboratively on our own farms, our packing facilities, with our transport partners and supply chain experts to make

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