

Interviewer: Digital HACCP Expert Jukka Väyrynen, Sensire Oy

Interviewee: Catering and Cleaning Service Manager Katja Vuorenmaa, Attendo Northern Finland

”I actually assumed it’d be more of a hassle”

Or how Attendo digitalized their catering kitchens with Sensire’s help

Thinking about Attendo, the major Finnish care home service provider, your first thought wouldn't be about cooking. However, the group serves thousands of meals daily in its more than 400 locations. Understandably, it takes considerable effort to ensure the consistent quality of food in such an operation.

So, last year the company's food service division decided to do something about the fact that all this was a burden to handle completely manually. The solution ended up being to digitalize the group's food safety management with the help of Sensire.



We sat down with Catering and Cleaning Service Manager Katja Vuorenmaa from Attendo to discuss how this kind of multilocation digitalization project proceeds and what the results are.

The Reasons for Digital Food Safety

Hello Katja, and thank you for talking with us about Attendo's kitchen digitalization. To start with, would you tell us a little bit about yourself?

I work for Attendo as a Catering and Cleaning Service Manager for our Northern Finland region. That means everything from Raahel all the way to Ivalo and Kuusamo. So that's a big geographic area encompassing almost 80 catering kitchens as well.

Previously I was in charge of food safety matters in the municipal sector and now at Attendo I'm again responsible for regulatory compliance in food safety processes.

Additionally, I'm in charge of the project for digitalizing our food safety. I'm also handling projects for process control system development and coordination as well, but food safety is a very clear area of responsibility for me.



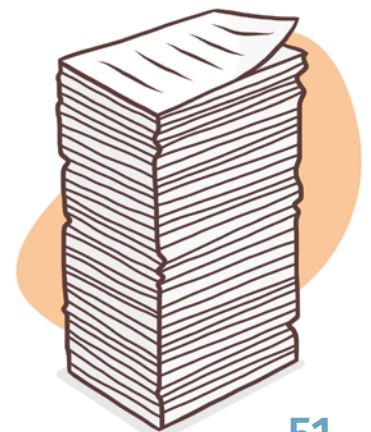
Digitalization is, of course, getting more topical for businesses, but what was it that started Attendo on this journey?

Initially it was the fact that we have many locations – over 400 all told – and our food safety plan is very important in directing work in their kitchens. And when we get feedback from the health inspector that some aspect of it should be modified, it can keep changing.

That's to say that while the basic structure of our food safety plan is common to all our locations, it can vary by quite a lot from location to location.

We also manage different kinds of locations - ones with on-premises food preparation, ones with food service only and then also personal kitchens for the residents. So, for certain locations the food safety plan may be quite compact, whereas on-premises food prep location are directed very comprehensively by the plan, as they should be.

Regulations, the Finnish food safety authority and the local health inspectors also frequently add things for us to include in the food safety plan. Thus far this has meant that every once in a while, all our locations receive a 70-80 pages long food safety document they need to personally update.



They would then need to go through the document and see which parts of it are relevant to them. That takes a lot of work.

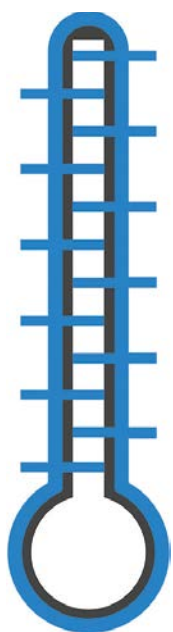
We're very happy to have the input from authorities, of course, because that has allowed us to create a very comprehensive and effective food safety plan - a real strength for us. Locally gathered new information has, however, been difficult to put into use on a national level.

So, you were looking to make it easier to manage the food safety plan and harmonize it nationally?

Yes, because the plan can "live" more easily in this digital form. We can now take any changes into practice immediately, not every half a year like we used to. And it was quite a lot of hassle to do it that way, too.

Of course, it also differs from location to locations how much the food safety plan ultimately directs what they are doing in practice.

One reason for digitalization is then also to develop our monitoring. It allows us to better make sure the food safety plan is in use and the actions it requires are getting performed.



So, it seems there was real need for this kind of solution. But next we could talk a bit about how this project has proceeded in practice.

So, the first thing you adopted was Sensire's automatic temperature monitoring system in your cold rooms, fridges and freezers. And the idea was that the main users would be trained by Sensire to use the system and these would then train people internally.

Would you say this was a working approach?

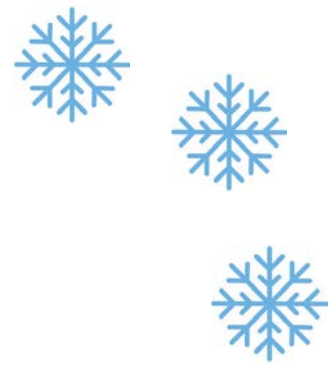
In all honesty, the first few trainings we did ourselves were probably a bit lacking, but that just meant there was a bit more emailing and calls back and forth for a while. But once we realized what we should pay special attention to it got a lot better very quickly.

And when we were giving those trainings, we also got feedback that the new system required some extra work for our employees. And we did have a few moments where needed to put our thinking caps on. But now I really should knock on wood, because we haven't had any issues for a while now.

And really, it's always the same when you adopt a new system. And I actually assumed it'd be more of a hassle or that it'd raise a lot more questions.



And the automatic monitoring system was installed in all your central kitchens, totaling some 130 locations.



Yes, that's including all our larger kitchens, not just central but also our larger catering kitchens.

And next you'll be starting with digital food safety management and food waste recording. But now there's also this new project where you'll be taking your cleaning and sanitation records also into Sensire's digital system.

How have your employees taken this, when you're very rapidly taking up all this new technology?

Well, we always try to consider all this from our employees' point of view: how they can best utilize these systems and how we can provide them all the information they need. This helps us make sure they're working according to plan and follow work instructions correctly.



So, we've already discussed these systems with our teams, and once we've gotten into it, they've shown definite enthusiasm.

But naturally the starting situation was some people being really excited, other a bit less so and still others were absolutely terrified. So, a totally normal situation in that respect.

So, suspicious to start with and then it gets easier when you get some experience?



Of course, when there's 140 locations and a couple hundred users, there's going to be all kinds of people in that group. And for some this tech adoption can be a big leap from what they're used to.

So, for example, that first training session had people with attitude like "another new system to learn?". But then on the next time they were all "it's actually pretty easy once you get to know it".



For some people, anything new is always going to be a bogeyman, and to others it's always an opportunity.

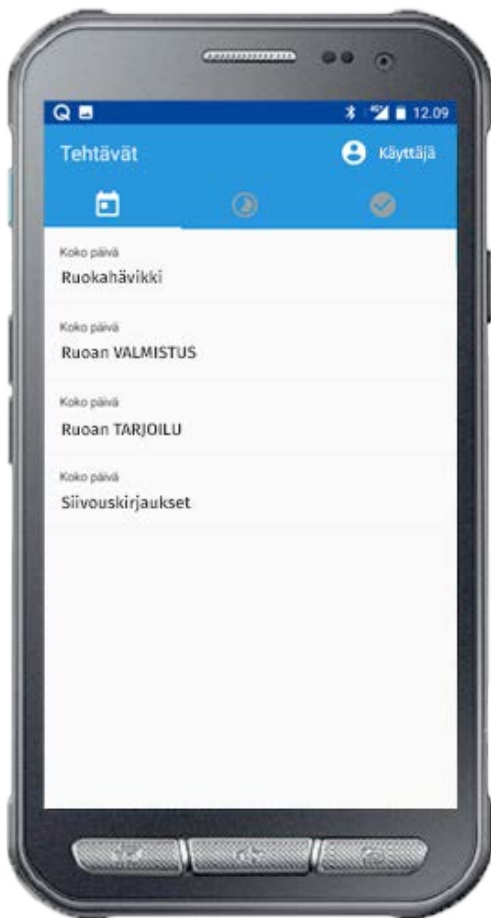
On the whole, though, the feedback we've received has been positive, and as for myself I haven't seen any negative comments. So, I'd say the employees have been mainly excited about the system.

So now that the process has been going on for a while, what are your thoughts? How are you feeling about the project?

All in all, it's been a really interesting process. I mean, you'd always like to have a bit more time to get to grips with it, but this is where we are now and that's enough.

And we've been pretty good at getting the systems running, meaning the food safety plan, food waste and now this cleaning and sanitation program which is only just getting started. And I believe we'll get all the help we need, if we feel there's a need for it.

Ultimately, it's been nice to have been part of this project. Personally, I like it when you get to come up with new ideas, and plan and sketch things from various points of view.



And you've been very good at challenging us. For us, Attendo is a great partner for also helping us take our solution to the next level and in the right direction – which means allowing us to better serve the needs of just such large, centrally-managed organizations like Attendo.

It's been nice to develop our solution and know-how with you, which will certainly allow us to use that same expertise on future projects. And your understanding of national requirements etc. has been very valuable for us as well.

So, it's been great privilege to work on digitalizing your kitchen processes with you.

I'd like to end this chat by thanking you for your time. It's great you agreed to share your real-life experiences of this kind of project with our readers. And maybe this will also help others, who have yet to start their own digitalization journey, to see that it's really not so terrifying a process as one might initially think. ■

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