

# Innovating the nervous system of companies The ERP evolution



Interview with

**Paola Pomi**

**Chief Executive**

**Officer**

**of Sinfo One**

by Dario Colombo

**From process automation to IoT, from Business Intelligence to market forecasting with Artificial Intelligence and Blockchain. This is how Sinfo One sees the development of management software, a tool that is considered essential for growth, whatever the size of the company.**

**S**info One's activity is a continuous effort of cultural promotion. While many players still focus on stimulating the diffusion of technologies, especially those linked to Industry 4.0, the Parma-based software vendor has decided to interpret its role in the digitization era in an innovative way, yet in keeping with its history. Today technology is certainly needed, but more than anything companies - especially small and medium sized ones - need someone who can offer them a compass to navigate in an increasingly volatile and uncertain scenario and find their route to success. At the basis of everything, according to Sinfo One, is what can be thought of as the essential element of business development: Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP). This should not be considered only in terms of technology, but rather as the last step of an organization in which digital tools deliver a precise business strategy and contribute to the growth of the company. "The ERP forms the backbone of the company, the foundation on which the whole structure can be built, that is why it must be considered indispensable for every kind of enterprise, regardless of the sector", says to *Sistemi&Impresa* **Paola Pomi, CEO of Sinfo One**. But, as we all know, technology - especially in the era of Industry 4.0 - is almost a commodity and the challenge definitely does not revolve around finding the best performing solutions, as these are available at a reasonable price to meet (almost) every requirement. "What makes the difference is the applicability of technology: this is the aspect that can offer a concrete benefit to customers. It means conveying to companies the advantages of applications that are really of use in day-to-day operations". This is why Sinfo One has long been concentrating in identifying cutting-edge applications linked to widely spread technologies, as in the case of ERP, which is continuously evolving and pitted to become an important ally for the performance and solution of many processes. But the focus of the interview with Pomi is not technology but the consultancy role of the system integrator who over time has accumulated extensive knowledge of the various industrial sectors.

**Let's go back a step: how is your market developing?**

We have reached and exceeded our goal for 2018: therefore, we can say that last year's performance was very positive, especially considering the challenging results that we were aiming for. This confirms that while betting on innovation does require a lot of effort, it clearly indicates that we are on the right path for 2019 too.

**Sinfo One is known for its strong presence not only in the Italian market, but abroad as well.**

**Which new clients have you acquired?**

Most recently, a leading Australian food company. Our competencies in the food area are what attracted the attention of this client. Despite the time zone difference, we were chosen as partners to implement solutions for improving the efficiency of production processes, increase time-to-market speed, in particular with respect to the need emerged following their decision to expand beyond Australia, to the Asian continent.

**It is quite unusual for a company on the other side of the globe to choose such a distant partner.**

**What convinced the management of the organization**

**- and in general all foreign clients - to bet on Sinfo One?**

It has to do with trust and the creation of a relationship. Italy is universally and understandably considered the most beautiful country in the world, but this is not enough to gain a standing in the business community. That is why we attend international events where we meet companies that, for the mere fact of participating in these occasions, are willing to start a dialogue. But what makes the difference is our visit to the clients' premises, even the most far away ones, to understand their specific needs. This move reveals how Sinfo One seriously intends to do business with them: that's when we show them that we have the competencies, projects, methodology and technology that their company needs.

**There is also Sinfo One's request for an act of trust: what does that consist in?**

After our on-site visit, we ask the client to join us in taking a look at the success stories of our clients in similar sectors. We build ad hoc tours that allow them to measure our reliability through concrete cases, told by the entrepreneurs and managers of the companies with which we cooperate. It is an opportunity to see first hand what we can do and to talk about it with people who have already implemented the same projects. This is a very important aspect for us, because we build loyalty and convince people who may be culturally very distant from us. In the same direction go the projects carried out with the magazine *Sistemi&Impresa*, which every year gives voice to Sinfo One clients who describe their experience and the technicalities of the projects they have implemented.

**What is the peculiarity that differentiates Sinfo One from competitors?**

Our company is based on our people's skills: each member carries specific personal values together with the company's values. Clients



are not simply 'buying' our advice or technology, but the whole ecosystem of specific competencies that we make available to them. We have staff members with over 20 years of experience, which means they are imprinted with the activities carried out for clients on their premises, living and breathing in their corporate culture.

**Considering your numerous activities abroad, are you planning to open any offices outside Italy?**

As we said, our core business is not selling technology, but offering competencies to solve business problems. This means that for each single project we create a team of specialists focused on our client's specific needs. Undoubtedly, having offices in the Arab Emirates, for example, would be prestigious but impractical and it would not allow us to be effective. As we are not SW vendors, we would not be able to turn geographic closeness with clients into an advantage: for Sinfo One, software is only a stepping stone to accomplish our mission, i.e. to help our clients realize their maximum potential by optimizing organization, processes and systems.

**Is there a 'fear' shared by clients during the project assessment stage?**

Every project, especially the most ambitious ones, inevitably changes the status quo, which means changing the way every person works. It is not unusual in the initial stages of the project to have ideas that depart from what had been agreed, but these situations can be managed if everyone shares the will to reach the objective. On the other hand, implementing the ERP means tackling a wide-ranging project that cuts across the entire supply chain: if we want to obtain maximum benefit, it is important to first

## IMPLEMENTING AN ERP SYSTEM MEANS FACING A PROJECT THAT CROSSES THE ENTIRE SUPPLY CHAIN

**Rosolino Pomi,**  
**President of Sinfo One,**  
**with Patrizia Pomi,**  
**Board Member**



understand how to operate, with the objective of making processes leaner. Therefore, we talk about *lean and fit*, which requires a total transformation. A project will inevitably have an impact on the organization and it is normal for change to generate fear, otherwise you are working on a minor activity.

**Does this require additional assistance on the part of Sinfo One?**

Right from the pre-sale stage, we stress that it will be necessary to provide support to change, because it is not merely a matter of implementing technology: change management is the real challenge. Change is always going to upset the existing balance, but it would not make sense to replicate the *status quo*. It is an indispensable step for continuing to increase margins and for growing in a healthy way. Only those who invest will be able to constantly improve performance.

**What kind of upheaval does the implementation of an ERP involve?**

The ERP is still the most important structure of a company: it forms its backbone and is therefore essential. Precisely because of its role in linking organizations and processes to obtain a single 'truth' and correlation between causes and effects and better understand performance and market, the ERP impacts the organization and forces it to become lean and fit. This means reviewing processes not to respond to an immediate need, but to set up an ecosystem able to meet the challenges of the future.

**Speaking of future, we often have to keep a step ahead of clients to anticipate their requests: how do you manage to be effective in the present and ready for the future?**

Technology needs to be flexible and enable us to adapt to the new challenges. For example, when we started collaborating with Tönnies - the German company that has joined our company as minority shareholder - we were dealing with a project geared to a company that was very much focused on the German market, just a



# Paola Pomi

**Paola Pomi - 45-year-old wife, mother and manager - has vast experience in the management of IT companies: she is the CEO of Sinfo One. After helping to create the Sinfo One team, Pomi still has many ambitions, dreams and leadership skills. She is an expert in managing projects involving large national and international teams, and has considerable experience of corporate processes, particularly in the areas of production and distribution. Among her many skills, Pomi is considered a leading expert in the implementation of ERP (Enterprise Resource Planning), PLM (Product Lifecycle Management) and BI (Business Intelligence) systems, and in the study of custom-made, innovative solutions, on both domestic and foreign markets. The CEO of Sinfo One has a wealth of experience in the sale of complex national and international projects with a strong focus on innovation, both in terms of technology and of market and implementation procedures. Pomi also has a keen ability to relate to key customers and understand their needs.**

few branches abroad, but relatively easy. But a short while later, two very important acquisitions were made in Denmark and Poland: the fact of having created a lean and fit system enabled the company to be reactive also in sectors other than their core business.

That means we succeeded in creating a system that was always performing well, able to adapt to the business needs of the client. It is not uncommon to be faced with sudden accelerations; this requires us to always keep a step ahead of the client. This aspect is by far the most exciting part of our work, because this is the way we generate the most value for our clients. To do this, however, you need to build solid foundations.

**We started our chat by talking about ERP, explaining its importance.**

**But what are the latest novelties in management software?**

ERPs - like all technology in general - must be in tune with the current situation. For example, estimates show that by 2020 50% of the workforce will be made up of Millennials, whose expectations in terms of user experience are increasingly in the direction of simple, linear and highly-customizable user interfaces. While in the past this was considered a side issue, today we start talking about it right from the pre-sale stage and clients urge us to deliver enhanced user-experience features. Connected with this issue is the need to customize the system to the specific needs of users.

**Another novelty is the automation of some processes: has ERP evolved?**

Once the management recognizes the repetitive nature of some actions, they ask for the possibility of automation. This means delegating to the system the automatic performance of some activities. Robotic Process Automation can, for example, handle the phase of reconciling invoices to delivery notes, exactly the same way an employee would do it, by looking for missing data and documents if needed. Or you can have a robot update currency exchange rates every day or check them without involving any staff. The introduction of automation simplifies the activities of staff in

an easy, intuitive way. Robots can also carry out actions triggered by signals arriving thanks to the Internet of Things.

**Is the use of IoT technology in ERP another step forward?**

The IoT enables the collection of information from the field and feeds the management system, which can then carry out actions automatically. For example, the IoT makes it possible to monitor the levels of the various product components and send the information to the ERP, so that it may send procurement requests or manage logistic-production needs. It also allows the system to obtain all the information from sensors, which is the basis for planning preventive maintenance in a more timely and efficient manner.







wants to describe in a simple way what lies behind technology, without using technical language: the history and growth of interest in the Blockchain, but also its different applications and their obstacles.

**Among the various novelties, we can't forget the development of Business Intelligence (BI), which remains a milestone for management systems...**

Traditionally, BI uses ERP data to tell us what has already happened, but the market now requires us to always keep a step ahead; today this is possible thanks to technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Machine learning, which allow us to make forecasts. For example, you can predict when machine downtime will occur or even which potential sales will be made, in some cases by crossing meteorological data that significantly affect the market of certain products (such as ice cream). But the real disruptive aspect is based on the fact that you have to start from what the companies want to predict and then identify the right technology - and intelligence - to reach the objective. After all, "*intellegere*" does mean "gaining greater knowledge"!

**So, does ERP continue to be an essential element for the growth of a company?**

There is a lot of information that usually remains trapped inside people's heads, while it would be necessary to share it with the whole organization. For example, it is no mystery that line workers can interpret the behaviour of machine thanks to the long experience they have in production, or that sellers are able to evaluate market trends thanks to their knowledge of a sector in which they operate daily. Well, if this information was managed by the ERP it would turn into corporate knowledge and therefore serve to generate additional value, without depending on a single person. In this sense, the ERP functions as the company's central nervous system. Indispensable for growing, but also for surviving.

**From IoT we get to Blockchain, a technology that many consider to be revolutionary. In what way is it linked to ERP?**

Blockchain has two different areas of application. On the one hand, it allows us to convey to the consumer all the information contained in the ERP: in this case, technology is applied to the product. On the other hand, it enables us to revolutionize the supply chain which also involves suppliers and distributors. For example, a partner who manufactures a specific part of a product can enter the information on the component directly into the Blockchain, thus making it possible for all the other players in the supply chain to obtain all the available data. And the Blockchain enables Smart contracts, i.e. contracts that allow automatic performance of particular actions once the conditions set out by the parties are reached. The blockchain can also be part of an efficiency-boosting process when, for example, it is used as a unifier of processes belonging to different legal entities, such as a layer combining the ERPs of different companies, with respect to data that are managed jointly.

**The technology sounds easy, but what is the impact on the organization? You have talked about it in a recent book entitled Blockchain. Technical juridical guide to its use (GoWare, 2019), written together with Maddalena Castellani and Cesare Triberti...**

In this case too the topic is not technology, but Change management, because you need to convince all the players in the value chain to use the Blockchain and it takes a lot of strength to manage this issue, going beyond the company's perimeter. The book we have written

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# The new corporate structure

In October 2018 Sinfo One opened its capital to two new minority shareholders, Tönnies and Fondo Agroalimentare Italiano I. The Pomi family continues to lead the company: Rosolino President, Paola Pomi CEO, Patrizia Pomi Board Member.

This operation allowed the Pomi family to begin a new phase in the development of Sinfo One through three main guidelines: actively participate in consolidation across the sector and expand the commercial offer to target specific new segments; maintain and strengthen food IT leadership, creating commercial synergies supported by the new shareholders; take advantage of the growing trend of IT investments and upgrades by agri-food companies (to ensure accuracy, control, quality, enhance processes, optimize reporting, accompany innovation...).

Pictures from top:

**CLEMENS TÖNNIES**

German entrepreneur, CEO and co-owner of Tönnies Lebensmittel Group

**FRANCESCO ORAZI**

Head of FAI 1

**STEFANO MASINI**

Investment Director of FAI 1