

Sixteen, six hundred, or sixteen thousand SDS

When the problem is not the number of PDFs, but the ability to manage them

Safety Data Sheets



Illustrative image created with the help of artificial intelligence

"Sixteen, six hundred, sixteen thousand" is the daily story of many companies that think they have "a certain number" of SDSs until you actually look in detail at where and how they have been stored.

In our work, we are used to a certain "flexibility" in numbers. When a company tells us that it has, for example, 1,000 SDSs, we know from experience that this number will almost always be an underestimate. Sometimes by 15%, sometimes by 30%, and in some cases even by 50%. It's part of the game: documents spread across plants, departments, and divisions, historical versions, products no longer in use, files in old shared folders.

This time, however, something happened that we had not seen before.

We started with an **initial estimate of around 2,000 SDSs**. This was a significant volume, but absolutely within our normal operating range, very close to the situations we encounter every day, even when the official numbers are 200, 500, or 1,000. However, once we actually opened the digital Pandora's box, there were not 2,000 documents.

There were 16,000 of them.

Eight times the initial estimate.

Not taking into account the different versions of the same SDS, SDSs from different manufacturers for the same raw material, different versions scattered throughout the company, the absence of a management process or even just a shared digital archiving system.

Again, these are all individual cases known to us, but multiplied far beyond the customer's perception.

And here begins the interesting part of the story. Because this is not the story of an out-of-scale project reserved for the few, nor is it a story of panic. It is the story of how you can go from "I don't even know how many SDSs I really have" to a clear, clean, and manageable database. Whether you start with 500, 2,000, or 16,000 documents, the underlying problem is the same: transforming chaos into a reliable tool for decision-making.

At the operational level, the process has been very concrete.

In about **two weeks of work**, we completed the entire cycle: uploading **16,000 SDSs** into the system, digitalization ChemParser, assessment and cleaning of the SDSs, and initial verification of the extracted data.

The cleaning and assessment work revealed the true operational scope: approximately **2,500 SDSs** relating to raw materials actually in use, on which to focus attention, controls, and decisions.

Everything that surrounded it (historical versions, duplicates, products no longer in use) was brought to light, organized, and brought back into a readable framework. Not for the sake of "cleaning up" itself, but to allow the customer to work every day on a set of data that made sense, instead of chasing files and attachments.

The curious part, if you will, is that there was no "lone hero" locked in the office for months.

The protagonist is not a task force of people, it is the **SDS-FullService model**:

- automatic cleaning
- guided assessment based on digitalized data
- automatic revision and obsolescence management

For the customer, this did not translate into "yet another HSE-IT project," but rather into:

- less time wasted searching for the correct SDS
- fewer risks associated with outdated documents
- a reliable picture of the hazardous substances you work with every day.

At the end of this journey, what matters is not so much the number of SDSs you started with, but what the customer has today.

Today, its SDS-Drive (the centralized SDS-FullService archive) contains only the most up-to-date and valid versions of the data sheets, evaluated and verified, without unnecessary duplicates and without "ghosts" inherited from the past. Together, we have defined a clear approval workflow: who can enter a new SDS, who verifies it, who approves it, what happens when a supplier sends an update, how new or discontinued substances are handled.

The result is simple to describe, but not easy to achieve: all hazardous substances in actual use are under control, in a single environment, with shared rules and traceable processes.

Perhaps the most reassuring part? **All of this was managed while the client continued to go about their daily business.** No all-consuming project that brought the company to a standstill, no permanent task force: we took on the task of uploading, digitalize, cleaning up, and structuring the data, leaving the client free to do their job well.

Whether you start with sixteen, six hundred, or sixteen thousand SDSs, the point is not to count documents, but to build the right reality on which to base your decisions and your work.

Eduardo Affinito

Every Software Solutions