Honeywell's User Input Subcommittee Has Clout

Honeywell actually listens to its users, and adopts many of their suggestions.

"Only Honeywell would have the guts," says Kerry Sartain, of Georgia Pacific (Atlanta, Ga.), "to give their user group a huge budget, a staff of developers and engineers, and trust their users to do right by it."

Sartain is the co-chair of Honeywell User Group's User Input Subcommittee. He serves with the Honeywell co-chair, Sturger Wagner, as the volunteer leader of a unique system that isn't limited, like most user groups, to advice and complaint. The UIS has a budget, and a staff seconded from Honeywell, and they can produce real products and product enhancements. They even set their own priorities.

In fact, the UIS is responsible for more than 137 enhancements to Honeywell products and software to date, with more coming every year. This year's UIS update is being released soon, with 16 new functions users requested for the Experion platform. In 2006, Sartain expects to release 10 more functions, including expanded Modbus addressing.

Sartain continued, "Honeywell, especially under Jack Bolick, has a huge commitment to listening to the Voice of the Customer. The UIS provides a big chunk of that Voice."

He went on to explain the process by which UIS operates.

"We meet for a week, three times a year. That's a huge commitment from our companies, to let us do that," Sartain said. They collect user input and organize it into a Long List. By a discussion-and-consensus-building process, they cut the suggested enhancements into a Short List.

This list goes to Honeywell, and is costed against the UIS budget. "Honeywell estimates by percent of our budget," Sartain said, "but we decide how to spend the money. If we want a big ticket item, one that is 20% of our annual budget, we decide." The Short List winds up as a final list of "Must-Dos" and some additional "stretch" items, which Honeywell might get to if staffing and time constraints allow.

Honeywell has dedicated a team of engineers and developers, with a full time program manager, Gary Innocenti. Approximately a dozen members of the Honeywell UIS staff are based in Phoenix, with the remainder working in the Honeywell facilities in India.

"Honeywell staffers fight over time to present in front of the UIS," Sartain points out, since the UIS is one of the ways to get a project done quickly. He points to the new accelerated backup and restore utility, which he estimates will save Georgia Pacific perhaps as much as $25,000 per hour of downtime as a restore is completed much more quickly. "We've also been beating Honeywell over the head to come up with real, detailed migration strategies," Sartain continued. "The reason Honeywell is providing so much better thought out migration paths and toolkits is because we've pushed hard for it," he concluded.

"We believe in working in partnership with our users," Honeywell CEO Jack Bolick said, "and the UIS is a major part of that partnership."

Standards-Based Interoperability?

CONTROL's biggest critique of ARC and the other major knowledgebase consultants has always been that they are very long on theory and very short on implementation. Andy Chatha, CEO of ARC, has apparently heard this from other people, such as his manufacturing sector clients, because ARC has dived into helping to foster and facilitate IOp (that is the TLA for Interoperability) working groups. Assisting in this drive to actually make stuff work is SAP, which has suddenly (with their acquisition of Lighthammer in June) become a significant force in plant level MES integration. This is a welcome change from when SAP said that manufacturing was a black box, and all you needed to know to control your operation was the number of goesintas and the number of goesoutas. There is a convergence happening. Chatha said that there is a need for an oversight steering organization to make sure all plant interoperability standards really interoperate, and there needs to be an organization devoted to implementation standards, and we couldn't agree more.

Speaking of Standards...

ISA's SP95 standards development committee on Enterprise-Control System Integration has completed the third of its well-received series of industry standards on enterprise-control system integration.

"Completion of Part 3 is an important milestone in the growing adaptation and use of the ISA-95 standards," says ISA-SP95 Chairman Keith Unger of Stone Technologies. This is especially true in light of Microsoft's announcement earlier this year of its support of the ISA-95 series as a key element in its plant-to-enterprise interoperability initiative, following a similar announcement of support by SAP in 2004.

ISA-SP95 previously published Part 1 of the series, "Models and terminology," and Part 2, "Object models and at-