

Industry alliances deliver significant value

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In today's automation industry, suppliers, customers, and support organizations are forging strategic alliances that deliver significant value to all participants. These alliances, employing cooperative collaboration that elevates open systems and interoperability to a higher level, now resonate loudly in the marketplace. Key players include technology suppliers (such as control system manufacturers, software developers, and field device vendors) and applicers (such as end users and system integrators).

Suppliers face pressure of meeting their customers' current needs, while supporting myriad possible future technology directions. Also, more often than not, suppliers have extremely vertical domain expertise, which limits their ability to troubleshoot and address problems. But just as end users seek a fully integrated process automation system, leading control suppliers are joining together to deliver customer-focused, integrated solutions to maximize the value of open technology and provide greater peace of mind.

Such cooperative collaboration delivers an expanding spiral of interrelated outcomes and values. For customers, collaborative alliances reduce the risks associated with implementation of complex control technology. By cooperating in an open, interoperable manner, and providing access to the best available solutions in the marketplace, automation suppliers help ensure great-

er productivity and safety for their customers.

Cooperative collaboration ensures the end user a robust, integrated control system framework that is simpler to operate and maintain, and helps in governing automation implementation. The collaborative approach brings structure to project execution strategies, and at the same time, ensures consistent configuration management. There is also the assurance of knowing vendors are engaged for the life of a project.

Overall, collaborative solutions lower total ownership cost for control system assets. Benefits include increased overall equipment effectiveness and reduced system lifecycle costs.

Lowering risk

For suppliers, collaboration addresses market realities by providing sound investment guidance when making technology decisions. Collaborative programs support the reuse of previous investments and lower risks associated with future technology selection. They also shorten product time-to-market by reducing design costs and development/qualification efforts.

Alliance partners are able to choose best-in-class technologies that can be applied to the customer's process, increasing productivity and optimizing processes. They also assist in assuring interoperability at different levels of automation so users can be confident that devices and assets are interfacing properly and delivering information to advanced applications.

The concept of cooperative collaboration is gaining momentum throughout the automation world. For example, ISA's Automation Alliance is an umbrella organization supporting various associations and societies engaged in manufacturing and process control activities. Membership in the alliance is open to vendors and others interested in promoting the development, implementation, and commercializa-

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Pursuing interoperability

Experience has shown that the performance of a manufacturing enterprise is best optimized through systemic integration. And a key implementation support for this integration is industry-sponsored standards of automation component interoperability. By adopting standards-based solutions, end users can leverage the functionality, features, and benefits resulting from assured connectivity with interoperable components.

Indeed, interoperability is driving automation vendors to look for new ways to provide value beyond just connectivity. Suppliers support interoperability because it levels the playing field for transferring control information and encourages competition based on merit. Interoperability enables vendors to develop feature-rich products that are selected by customers based on their performance and cost benefits, not just their system compatibility.

End users support interoperability because it reduces implementation risks, decreases integration effort, and increases speed to operating value. Supplier-supported validation efforts are the strongest foundation for ensuring "plug-and-play" performance across the control system platform.

tion of automation technologies.

In the supplier community, companies such as Honeywell, Yokogawa, and Rockwell are at the forefront of the vendor alliance movement. They are taking collaboration to a new level by bringing competitors together with a common goal: to deliver supplier-independent asset management solutions using open

protocols like FOUNDATION fieldbus, HART, Profibus and OPC.

Such cooperative partnerships for asset management can result in:

- Improved process performance. Supplier cooperation helps identify and define upsets, which translates into clear and actionable information for plant personnel. It also establishes a knowledge-

base for reliability-centered maintenance efforts. Resources can then be strategically applied to resolve production issues and improve the return on assets.

- Increased knowledge sharing. Most automation system platforms now use open industry standards for data transmission and exchange, but parameter nomenclature used to identify data may vary. Without collaboration and the disclosure of parameter locations, solution development is time-consuming and often unavoidably sub-standard.

- Greater freedom of choice. Thanks to open vendor alliances, end users can select from a variety of suppliers and integrated solutions to fulfill their field equipment, support software, and service requirements. Alliance programs also promote the customer's ability to award business to suppliers delivering superior value.

Keys to success

Alliances are, by their nature, precarious endeavors. Partners may undertake a shared project, yet each organization has its own goals and expectations. Participants must come to an alliance with the resources needed to support themselves, but also bring assets to be shared with others to reach a common objective.

In an alliance, trust is difficult to establish yet easy to lose. Periodic face-to-face communication between partners is essential. Partners must take time to learn the other companies' organizational DNA and monitor their behavior for consistency and predictability.

Today's evolving business model is causing suppliers to become much more focused around their core competencies. This leads to better application of R&D investment resources and increased customer satisfaction from those resources. In the future, suppliers who try to be all things to all people will end up being only good enough. Cooperative collaboration forces suppliers to ask themselves difficult questions about future investments and take a hard look at their core competencies. End-users are the ultimate beneficiaries of this outcome.


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