

PRESS RELEASE

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The immediate future for automation in the food industry

Chris Evans, Marketing and Operations Group Manager at Mitsubishi Electric – Automation Systems Division UK comments on what to look out for now and what is just round the corner in terms of automation for the food and beverage industry.

First of all, not every food producer has the same perspective on automation, due mainly to the fact that there is such a wide spread of adoption levels. We are talking bridging the gap between craft breweries and hand-made foods to some of the largest automated processing sites in the world.

As soon as machines are involved in preparation and packaging tasks however, some themes are pretty much universal. The requirements for efficiency monitoring, product tracking and traceability, faster, safer, lower cost processing and packaging solutions and plant flexibility are all growing.

As a result there are some advancements in automation technology that design, process and maintenance engineers all need to be aware of: one of the biggest is the increasing use of small articulated arm and SCARA style robots to perform repetitive tasks. We host regular seminars on the use of robotics in the food industry and attendees are usually genuinely surprised by the low package cost, combined with ease of use and simple integration.

This acceptance is driving significant sales growth,

correspondingly this means industry usage is on the rise. If the robots can be integrated quickly - in our case using the iQ-Works software suite which is a common platform for programming and configuring all the machine control disciplines of PLC, HMI, inverter, servo and robots - then the cost of integration also comes down.

Platform integration is a major theme when it comes to delivering multiple benefits, users expect an incremental improvement when it comes to looking at replacing individual automation components such as drives, servo systems and PLCs, however when you take a holistic view of your automation system, then you can make significant gains.

A good example is using a powerful PLC to manage a production line, it can coordinate everything from guided operator pick to light systems that improve quality and throughput for manual workers, to conveyor systems, process plant, ovens and chillers, high speed packaging machines and robot cutting, packing and stacking lines.

If you make sure all the peripheral automation equipment is from one vendor, then several things happen: design and commissioning time plummets, so install cost drops, reliability goes up, speed increases as plant equipment works with better synchronisation, productivity increases and then so does competitiveness and profitability.

Not only that but the information being produced by the system becomes easy to display on HMIs, the quality of that information improves and the transparency of the plant increases greatly. More managed data means regulatory compliance is easier to meet, improvements in plant performance are easier to make and benchmark the results. Maintenance is far faster and easier, particularly with monitoring alarms and set operating parameters using mobile devices. If you can't see crucial information on your entire plant process on your phone or tablet, then maybe it's time to talk to your automation vendor.

From a Mitsubishi Electric point of view this argument is particularly relevant, not simply because we are in the unique position of being able to deliver our own manufactured inverters, servos, PLCs, motion, CNC controllers, HMIs and robot solutions that are totally integrated, and work on a common automation platform, but, because we are involved in a great



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many food and beverage industry applications, and can see where big advances in plant efficiency and production volume increases are being made.

The future for automation in the food industry is most certainly going to be centred on increased plant and automation platform integration, simply because the universal advancements that producers require cannot be delivered without it.

About Mitsubishi Electric

With over 90 years of experience in providing reliable, high-quality products to both corporate clients and general consumers all over the world, Mitsubishi Electric Corporation is a recognized world leader in the manufacture, marketing and sales of electrical and electronic equipment used in information processing and communications, space development and satellite communications, consumer electronics, industrial technology, as well as in products for the energy sector, water and waste water, transportation and building equipment.

With around 124.000 employees the company recorded consolidated group sales of 39.3 billion US Dollar* in the fiscal year ended March 31, 2014. Our sales offices, research & development centres and manufacturing plants are located in over 30 countries. Mitsubishi Electric Europe, Industrial Automation – UK Branch is located in Hatfield, United Kingdom. It is a part of the European Factory Automation Business Group based in Ratingen, Germany which in turn is part of Mitsubishi Electric Europe B.V., a wholly owned subsidiary of Mitsubishi Electric Corporation, Japan.

The role of Industrial Automation – UK Branch is to manage sales, service and support across its network of local branches and distributors throughout United Kingdom.

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