Automation and then some….

While the integration of control systems remains at the core of VINCI Energies automation businesses in the UK & RoI, several new services are helping clients to reach new levels of safety, efficiency and reliability. Head of the automation perimeter Derek Burton explains how.

Control system integration projects account for around 85% of our work within VINCI Energies UK & RoI automation perimeter (our collective name for the group of businesses specialising in control systems integration – Actemium Automation Nottingham, Actemium Automation Teesside and Cougar Automation). Clients come to us with a requirement, we design a control system, acquire the hardware and then programme it for a fixed price to perform particular functions in line with the client's needs. But we've also been developing a number of complimentary services that go above and beyond the competition.

24/7 Support

In addition to our project teams, we have a separate team dedicated to providing 24/7 client support. Many of our competitors will persuade a couple of engineers to carry a mobile phone but if these individuals are engaged on a project they are not genuinely available at a moment's notice. Our team is managed to a rota and waits by the phone like coiled springs for a call from a client when their system goes down. When that happens, our engineers are either able to connect remotely to the client's equipment and provide some fault diagnosis or/and they will jump in their car and get off to site and fix it.

Cybersecurity

Another important differentiator for us is our cybersecurity capabilities. The majority of our customers are big corporate entities who have an interest in cybersecurity but it often stops at the IT department, leaving industrial control systems exposed. When you think about the implications of a cybersecurity breach on IT – typically your website goes down or something steals some email addresses – it's nowhere near as serious as if a plant were to be compromised. Plant and equipment could be rendered unavailable, put in a dangerous state or even blow up! We understand that implementing cybersecurity measures from scratch for industrial control systems can be daunting and expensive prospect so we start by carrying out a risk assessment and providing a road map for clients

to address at their own pace.

Internet of things

IoT has become a real buzzword in the automation industry of late but customer demand is still fairly limited. To supplement the small number of client IoT projects we have completed so far, we have been experimenting with our own in-house IoT projects so that when demand does increase – as I'm sure it will – we will be ready with both the knowledge and experience. For example, we have installed a number of sensors in our car park at Cougar Automation, which detect when spaces are occupied or vacant and created some animated visualisations of the data.

Data analysis

Whether IoT enabled or not, all of our control systems are gathering vast amounts of data. Previously this data was collected simply as a by-product of automation but clients are now becoming increasingly interested in how we can use it to improve efficiency. For example, we can count how often we start and stop motors and use that to schedule planned maintenance – if we see that a motor has been running for say, 5,000 hours we know it is due for a service. With our experience, we can help customers to analyse, visualise and act on their data, saving time, energy and costs.

Everything under one roof

The control systems integration landscape in the UK and Republic of Ireland consists of hundreds of small businesses of around 20 employees. It's highly unusual that they grow to the size of VINCI Energies UK & RoI automation perimeter. We have 180 staff in 10 locations, which gives clients confidence in the breadth of our knowledge and experience, as well as the resources we can bring to bear. Whatever clients throw at us, even if it's outside of the typical realm of automation – like 24/7 support, cybersecurity, IoT or data analysis – we have the network and geographic reach to deliver it.

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