

Satisfied customers through integration

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35 Open Integration partners gathered together at Endress + Hauser in Reinach, Switzerland, to share their experiences and thoughts for the first time. A highlight of the event was a presentation from representatives of the chemical and pharmaceutical industries outlining how they benefit from the partner program during digitalization of their processes – and what they would like to see in the future.

The goal of the Open Integration program initiated by Endress + Hauser can be summed up quickly: the simple, fast and manufacturer-independent integration of components and devices into various automation systems. And, almost more importantly, satisfied customers.

While it sounds simple in theory, when it comes to day-to-day system operation, it's far from that. Even the most experienced automation specialists have great respect for multi-vendor systems. That also applies to complete solutions “from a single source.” After all, digital communications – a precondition for the extensive use of existing intelligence in field devices and systems – places serious demands on integration.

With its Open Integration partner program, Endress + Hauser is inviting providers of control technology, fieldbus infrastructure, measurement technology and actuator systems to test and document the interaction of their products even more extensively in the interests of their customers. The cooperation partners include Auma Riester, Bürkert, Festo, Flowserve, Hima Paul Hildebrandt, Honeywell Process Solutions, Mitsubishi Electric, Pepperl + Fuchs, Phoenix Contact, Rockwell Automation, Schneider Electric and Turck.

Open standards as a basis

The foundation of this effort is open communication standards (Hart, Profibus, Foundation Fieldbus, EtherNet/IP or Profinet), as well as open integration standards (FDT, EDD, FDI). With a nearly unlimited selection of options, the reference topologies represent practical combinations suitable for applications in the chemical, life sciences, food & beverage, oil & gas, power & energy, primaries & metal and water & wastewater industries.

The reference topologies take into account industry-typical requirements such as explosion protection, availability and redundancy. Each topology is thoroughly tested and documented in the lab in Reinach in conjunction with the partners, after which the recommendations are published.

Interoperability tests create added value

And how do customers benefit from the Open Integration partner program? Every problem that the integration experts discover prior to commissioning can be resolved at a much lower cost compared to fixing the issue in the field at some later point. Customers receive concrete, validated recommendations for automating their systems, which go well beyond established conformity and interoperability testing while ensuring seamless integration. Last but not least, they save time and money.

With developments such as IIoT and APL, users will face new challenges, plus integration testing will be given added weight. This makes it even more important for the Open Integration partners to work together over the long term. The participating customer and provider representatives were in full agreement on this point. Cyber security, in addition to the issue of connectivity, will play a key role in the future. They furthermore agreed that effective strategies need to be developed to counter new entrants in the automation industry such as IBM or Amazon.

Customer-driven developments

One thing was clear during the get-together in Reinach in early June: the process control industry wants open, interoperable systems instead of proprietary solutions. One of the users wants uniform, structured access to static information via QR- and RFID-supported type plates in accordance with DIN 91406. Standardized diagnostics in line with NE 107 is also at the top of the wish list.

In the near term, Endress + Hauser wants to work with its partners to address these and other open issues with the aim of utilizing Open Integration to offer customers even more value-add during digitalization of their processes. The common goal: satisfied customers who can extensively utilize the opportunities that digitalization brings with little risk.