User conferences offer solid ROI

Ron Kuhfeld, Editor in Chief

Most of you are incredibly time limited these days. You put in long hours at work, then spend your "free time" keeping your homes repaired, running errands, chauffeuring your children here and there, and the list of tasks goes on. However, I'm going to risk receiving a few less-than-complimentary emails by suggesting that you add yet one more item to your to-do lists—namely, attend user conferences sponsored by instrument and control system suppliers.

I've participated in several of these the past 12 months, and find that they offer a great opportunity to share ideas with peers from other companies, and are an excellent source of practical information on everything from technology trends to improving a company's bottom line. What sets them apart from trade shows is the fact that all of those in attendance can share their real-world experiences with, and knowledge of, a particular vendor's technology. The insight derived from these exchanges of information can be of significant benefit to the attendees' companies.

At the end of September I attended the 2003 Emerson Global Users Exchange Conference in Nashville, TN, and found it to be a particularly valuable experience. More than 1200 engineers from 28 countries opted to spend their time at this well-planned, user-orchestrated event, and from the conversations I had with other attendees, my take is that many assimilated their fair share of technical and business know-how as presented in the conference's 165 sessions.

John Berra, president of Emerson Process Management, kicked off the four-day User Exchange by doing something that isn't done nearly enough—he applauded the efforts of the engineers in the audience. "You are the unsung heroes of your companies," said Berra. "You're the leaders and forward thinkers who have advanced the safety, efficiency, and profitability of your companies and the industry." A hollow gesture designed to flatter Emerson customers? Anything but! From the tone of his voice and expression on his face, it was clear that Berra—who got his start in this business as an instrument and electrical engineer for Monsanto—meant every word he said.

The bulk of the User Exchange consisted of short courses and workshops, where we learned about control technology and its potential impact on business performance. For example, in the presentation "Standardization of Control systems within Ciba Specialty Chemicals World-Wide Using DeltaV," Ciba engineers explained, in great detail, the many business and engineering advantages derived from setting a global technology standard. Far from being a sales pitch for Emerson, the gist of this workshop was that, while DeltaV was, in fact, a very good system, there are a host of benefits derived from the standardization process itself—no matter what the system that was selected might be. In another presentation, this one by Doug White, of Emerson Process Management Process Solutions, we were given an indepth understanding of how to justify automation investments through plant production improvements. White explained methodologies for developing credible, accurate, and consistent quantitative estimates of financial return on investment for new automation technologies.

So, if you hear about user conferences that are within the reach of your travel budget, consider attending. I know that it won't be easy to get away, given the amount of downsizing that has taken place the last couple of years. But if you can somehow manage it, there's a good chance you'll come back from it with ideas that can significantly increase your operation's productivity. Thus, you'll get a solid return on your investment in time and money at the conference, and open the door for others to attend similar events in the future. ■■■

{editor's notebook}

DeltaV. Easy.

Avoid Abnormal Situations Through Prediction

Massively Reduce Engineering and Commissioning Time

Train Operations and Maintenance in Fraction of Usual Time

Increase Free Time

Easily Connect With Existing Automation and Enterprise

Expand "On-The-Fly" Without Shutdown

Enjoy Evenings and Weekend

Predictability
1000s of "smart" field devices providing early alerts of abnormal situations.

Productivity
Reduce project labor costs, wiring, and rack room capital costs.

Scalability
Add-on and replace when you need to.

Connectibility
Easily transition to digital bus technologies for better performance.

DeltaV: Digital Automation that Gives You Something Extra. A Life.

Livability

Today the demands are greater and you're having to work harder. And automation technology that was good enough for yesterday, isn't good enough for today.

The DeltaV™ system's easy-to-use digital busses, like FOUNDATION™ fieldbus, DeviceNet, AS-i bus, and Profibus deliver faster upfront engineering and installation, and provide better information to make your operations run smoother and more hassle free—easy.

Bottom line—now you can take advantage of today's digital technologies to minimize the daily grind and help you find time for what's important—a life.

DeltaV

visit:
EasyDeltaV.com

EMERSON
Process Management

EMERSON. CONSIDER IT SOLVED.™