

Industry Outlook: They Called Me Nuts

Written by Thomas J. Burke, President & Executive Director, OPC Foundation
Tuesday, 01 August 2006 18:44



Thomas J. Burke, President & Executive Director, OPC Foundation Yes, they really did call me nuts- *and a few other names, too*

. They told me I was crazy to suggest that competitors would work together to develop an interoperability standard, which they would then build products to support. As it has turned out, however, that wasn't such a nutty idea after all.

Like other industry standards, developing this one did require competitors to collaborate with each other. Enhancing it demanded even more intense collaboration with both vendors and other competitive standards organizations-*all focused on creating a successfully deployed standard that addressed multi-vendor interoperability*

As you probably know, many industry standards are not worth the paper they're printed on. For example, a standard could be technically superior and well on the way to solving world hunger, but end users would have to embrace it and insist (through their purchasing power) that vendors actually build solutions based on it. Otherwise- despite good intentions and sound science—such a standard wouldn't be considered "successful."

But, back to my crazy (some said "fundamentally flawed") dream of total interoperability. . .

Because I had been told so many times that it would be impossible to achieve cooperation among competitors, in the beginning we chose to solve a problem that the vendors themselves wanted. The side effect would be that we actually were solving a problem that end users could benefit from.

Industry Outlook: They Called Me Nuts

Written by Thomas J. Burke, President & Executive Director, OPC Foundation
Tuesday, 01 August 2006 18:44

To do so, we hand-picked a small set of competitive companies to work together, hoping to build consensus and adoption among them first. Later, we would prove the technology and massmarket it to others in the hope that they would adopt the technology for total interoperability across the automation domain. That's when reality set in. We never could have imagined the challenges and uphill battle we would face attempting to get our standard adopted by those outside our initial task force of core companies. We learned plenty in the process, though, including:

- That you must solve real-world problems that vendors and end-users want solved
- That the business value proposition in all cases must be the fundamental reason for a standard
- That the guiding principle is one of achieving consensus through collaboration with vendors and consortiums
- That competitors must check their weapons at the door
- That success is measured by adoption- *the best solution might not be the most feasible one*

This year, the OPC Foundation celebrates its tenth anniversary. That's 10 years dedicated to building interoperability- *one step at a time*. To say that I am delighted with the adoption and support of both OPC members and non-members alike would be an understatement. It has been a remarkable journey. Through it all, I've tried to remember the following advice I received early in my career. . .

"Maintain, at all times, a positive, constructive, progressive attitude towards your job, your company and your working associates. Always think in terms of how things can be done, never in terms of why they cannot. Such an attitude leads upward. An attitude of indifference can only lead to mediocrity and failure." I trust these words will encourage you, too, as you pursue your own crazy, nutty dreams, whatever they may be. **MT**

thomas.burke@opcfoundation.org