

Addressing The Staffing Challenges Of A Global Market

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Ninety percent of manufacturers are experiencing a shortage of qualified production employees—from machinists to technicians— according to a recent survey by the Manufacturing Institute. In fact, a National Association of Manufacturers report predicts that by 2020, U.S. manufacturing will need up to 10 million new skilled workers to meet needs. Rapid global expansion of manufacturing centers, experienced engineers retiring in droves and declining enrollment in U.S. engineering programs are fueling this trend. Because of the enormity of these issues, automation suppliers have to step in to help companies bridge the gap.

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In light of the pressure to consistently produce more quality products with a globally shrinking pool of time and resources, automation suppliers offer companies services and solutions that can be leveraged to increase employee expertise and ramp up productivity and profitability with fewer resources than ever before. These services offer specialized expertise across a wide range of technical domains, such as process production, safety, networks and security. The knowledge, tools and experience that suppliers offer can be the difference between struggling to make on-time delivery of orders and fully optimizing overall equipment effectiveness and return on net assets.

The keys to global success

Technology-enabled services provide options that help manufacturers achieve consistent quality and production levels across the globe. Remote monitoring allows companies to allocate

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their limited worker resources where they're needed. This bolsters the bottom line because of decreases in downtime. Quality is impacted as well—problems that can go unnoticed by busy operators are caught by remote engineers that monitor for any deviation from normal operating parameters. An online knowledge base including application notes, error messages, problems/solutions, release notes and downloads with an easy to use and flexible search engine is also key to putting all locations on an equal footing.

Despite technology allowing 24/7 service from anywhere, it's still important for automation providers to offer local engineers delivering technical services and training, in local languages. Local service locations, remanufacturing hubs and training facilities are one way to ensure quick response and service times—key in a world that demands on-time delivery of products and services. A global account manager who can speak to what a customer is doing anywhere in the world is also a vital part of global consistency and effectiveness.

The diminishing expertise in the workforce makes it even more important for service vendors to be ready to help customers accomplish larger tasks, like migrating from legacy systems or maintenance programs. Companies can't spare the manpower or keep up with the rapidly changing technology of today's automated systems. Often the only way to get these efforts accomplished with little to no disruption to plant operation is to turn to a third-party service provider.

Bridging the gap

This shortage of skilled manufacturing workers is daunting. At Rockwell Automation, we view it as quite possibly the single largest issue the industry faces. Reputations are built on delivering quality goods on time to a global network of customers. An unskilled or understaffed workforce makes that extremely difficult.

Options exist to address these issues. Engaging a service partner that can provide technology-enabled services, skilled resources and training on a consistent global basis to bridge the gap between manufacturers' global needs for staffing and the existing labor force is extremely effective.