

## Nearly Seduced by the Dark Side

Written by Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor  
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Robert C. Baldwin, CMRP, Editor Rockwell Automation Fair, celebrating the 100th anniversary of Rockwell's Allen-Bradley brand, drew more than 14,000 people (customers, speakers, exhibitors, and Rockwell personnel) to Milwaukee in mid-November.

Displays of advanced technology covering embedded sensors and adaptive control (including a lubrication sensor for monitoring the health of critical fluids), diagnostics and prognostics (including adaptive control for motors, pumps, and fans), open system architecture for condition-based maintenance (leveraging IEEE and MIMOSA standards), agent-based recon-figurible systems, integrated information systems, and wireless communication were quite impressive.

No less impressive were pavilions featuring more traditional products and services, including information and communication technology that can enable reliability personnel or anyone in the plant with appropriate access to a browser on the network to query, monitor, measure, trend, and analyze a host of data inputs: speed, cycles, time, pressure, temperature, vibration, current, force, process recipes, production rate, analytical reports, inventory, order status, and more.

As was explained at the Fair, the right system programmed with the right alarms can tell you when and where to do maintenance. Sounds like a neat trick. And it is.

These systems provide answers to a number of advanced maintenance challenges. I'm

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fascinated by their potential in maintenance and reliability. But am I, in my enthusiasm, becoming like Anakin Skywalker of Star Wars, in danger of being seduced by the dark side of the Force and turned into a Darth Vader? Almost, but not quite.

As intriguing as these systems are, they are only part of the equation. How do you determine the alarm level? How do you reduce the number of alarms? How will you respond to the work orders that system kicks out? How do you reconcile maintenance and production requirements?

Now you are back on the hard-core maintenance engineering side. The control system can be a powerful tool, but it must be made to serve the maintenance side of the Force.

Control and automation engineers can be your allies and help you get the information you need to do the right maintenance if you can get them to understand the full scope of maintenance engineering.

We must induce them to come over from the dark side. But, which side is the dark side? It is always the other side. What we really need is the power of logic and smart business management to enlighten both sides and build a team to serve the enterprise. **MT**

