Written by Gary Mintchell
Friday, 23 March 2012 13:55

W*elcome to this new bi-monthly column focusing on how automation impacts maintenance and reliability. I've been Editor-in-Chief of* Automation World *magazine since it started in 2003. Prior to that, I had a career in manufacturing. I've known the team at* ***Maintenance Technology*** *for many years and have spoken twice at MARTS. This is a welcome opportunity to share my knowledge and passion for automation with another set of readers.*

Digital networks have had an almost accidental benefit for maintenance. Initially touting reduced wiring as the advantage, almost immediately the bene-fits of built-in diagnostics proved to be far greater than any wiring reduction.

Foundation Fieldbus, with its ability to interface with most asset-management applications, is slowly gaining traction in the process industries. Over the past year, several enormous new plants in Asia have specified this network. Many of us have had two questions regarding the direction of the Foundation Fieldbus specification. The first is how the network organization will use its High Speed Ethernet (HSE) protocol. The second concerns how the various wireless technologies will play in the network.

Those questions found answers on December 1, 2011, in Baytown, TX, at a Fieldbus Foundation Media Day. The overall technology announced has been dubbed "Remote Operations Management" (ROM). The essential components of the platform will, among other things, provide a more powerful SCADA experience as well as further empower the mobile worker. They will have the ability to handle greater point-count Remote I/O and be able to incorporate various wireless standards, including ISA 100.11a of the International Society of Automation and WirelessHart of the Hart Communication Foundation.

ROM topology includes a ROM device that is essentially a gateway for communicating to existing Foundation Fieldbus H1 networks, as well as wired Hart and the two existing wireless sensor networks from ISA and Hart Communication Foundation. HSE will enable both the new

Remote I/O and the backhaul to the DCS or asset-management application.

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