

My Take: "Smart Company"

Written by Jane Alexander, Editor-In-Chief
Tuesday, 20 October 2009 23:52



Publisher Bill Kiesel and I had the pleasure of spending some time in smart company recently, or, more precisely, "with a real smart company." We were at the 2009 Emerson Global User's Exchange in Orlando, FL, headlined under the banner of "Engaging Minds. Amazing Results." I'll say!

It's great when a users-group event lives up to advanced billing. This one did not disappoint.

During our stay, we learned about a variety of new and/or upgraded solutions to your concerns. The idea behind many of these incredibly smart, "gee-whiz" rollouts was the "conquering of complexity" — *with much of it being based on practical and proven human-centered design concepts*. These are basically good ergonomic principles, wherein cognitive issues, especially when it comes to critical process monitoring- and control-applications, are just as important as musculoskeletal issues. That's because, unlike the chairs we sit in and the computer keyboards we use, industrial processes and facilities can and do blow up with deadly consequences. Until now, however, a great deal of high-tech industry investment has gone into feature- and hardware-enhancements, instead of into designing around how people actually use the technology.

Emerson recognizes that it's time for technology to serve people — *instead of the other way around*. Putting its money where its mouth is, the company has established the Human Centered Design (HCD) Institute. In collaboration with Carnegie Mellon University, the focus of this endeavor is on ensuring that user work-practices and improved task-completion are at the heart of every new product the company introduces. A culmination of more than five years of customer-work-practice analysis, new-product-development re-engineering and organizational training, the goal is straightforward: Make reliable, compatible, cost-effective products and increase ease-of-use and workforce productivity.

One example of this HCD commitment on display at the Users Exchange was a unique family of

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more than 50 Device Dashboards for Emerson's AMS® Suite: Intelligent Device Manager. According to the company, these intuitively designed interfaces provide — *in one glance* — a clear view of everything users need to evaluate, diagnose and configure a field device. That type of enhanced usability is a serious need for end users pressured by larger facilities run by fewer, less experienced personnel, explains Duane Toavs, director of the HCD Institute. "They want technology to work for them, streamlining their routine scanning of plant assets, quickening their recognition of issues and shortening the time to convert information to decision-making and action." But, they don't want to rely on experts to do it — *and they don't want to undergo extensive training to make it work*

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While this column may not be large enough to cover everything we learned in Orlando, one thing we can't ignore here was the announcement of Emerson partnering with Meridium on smarter asset management tools. The result is the new AMS® Suite: Asset Portal v4.0 powered by Meridium.

Also announced was the PlantWeb Services offering to design, implement and quantify business benefits of asset strategies for users. Meridium's best-practice deployment models are part of this offering, which seems to apply to just about every system in a plant. Lots more came out of this year's Users Exchange. You'll be reading about it in upcoming issues. Look for it soon. **MT**

