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INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION & PROCESS CONTROL

DOES O-PAS GET A PASS?

O-PAS is the Open Process Automation Standard. It was initiated by Exxon-Mobil who worked with The Open Group to create a standard, and then oversee the implementation of the standard using test benches and trials. Bill Lydon wrote a

comprehensive report on the successes or not of the O-PAS standard as it was reported by O-PAS at the ARC Forum in early February (read it here: <https://www.automation.com/en-us/articles/february-2024/opa-open-controllers-decoupling-field-io?listname=Automation%20&%20Control%20News%20&%20Articles>). Lydon has many questions about the standard, some of which I share, and some I disagree with.

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Does O-PAS get a pass?
- The 21st Century Marketing Blues
- David W. Spitzer writes the book on Climate Change

What if they gave a party and nobody came?

As this is a “user developed” standard, it remains to be seen if any of the major automation system vendors will do more than warm a seat on the standard development committee. I still don’t understand why The Open Group has continued to control the standard on Exxon’s behalf, when it should have given the standard to ISA and the IEC, both of which are international standards bodies with many overlapping standards already in the field.

In 2016, I asked Ed Bartusiak, when he was still at Exxon, “Ed, what are you going to do when the big vendors all say ‘No’.” I still want an answer.

I have been asking for years, ever since Exxon first started this development back in early 2000, what the real position of the major automation vendors will be. The only major vendors who have done much to assist the O-PAS standard have been Schneider Electric and Yokogawa. Neither Honeywell, nor Emerson, nor ABB have agreed to produce products that incorporate the O-PAS standard at all. In fact, Emerson is now introducing what they call an entirely new concept for process control: a software-based control system. Whatever that means.

INSIDER

INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION & PROCESS CONTROL

In 2016, I asked Ed Bartusiak, when he was still at Exxon, “Ed, what are you going to do when the big vendors all say ‘No’.” I still want an answer.

The fact remains that when vendors do not agree with a standard, they don’t design and build products to that standard. There have been many such occurrences over the past few decades, including HART 6.0, and various attempts by General Motors and others. It doesn’t matter what the end users really want, in the final analysis, because the vendors control the offerings. We have seen Monsanto, DuPont, Dow Chemical, Texaco, and even Exxon try to design and build their own control systems—all of which eventually failed. Monsanto sold theirs to Emerson, DuPont and Dow Chemical gave theirs to ABB. The fact is that large asset owners don’t make control systems, they make products, and they’ll continue to make them regardless of what control systems they are forced to use. Asset Owners have a terrible track record of trying to force automation system vendors to produce something other than what the automation vendors already want to produce. It doesn’t look like it is going to get any better going forward from here either.

This isn’t a hypothetical. It has happened at least three times that I know about, and the end user company blinked every time.

Let’s say the quiet part out loud, shall we? Let’s say company X has fifty or sixty complete control systems provided by company M. Company X says, we’d like you to use O-PAS or we will go out to bid to companies who will use it. Company M

thinks about it and their sales manager for company X says, “Well, we’re sorry, but the service contract we negotiated with you for prompt premium service was based on you continuing to buy our control systems, so we’re going to have to drop you to a lower tier for service now that you aren’t locked in with us.” What do you think company X’s management will say? This isn’t a hypothetical. It has happened at least three times that I know about, and the end user company blinked every time.

In addition, the security baked into the O-PAS standard doesn’t appear to be any better than any other control system design. This is not a good thing. Nobody is building security into field devices, or backplanes, or smart power supplies. So, these are vectors for security lapses and penetration and it doesn’t appear that O-PAS is addressing them.

In the final analysis, I continue to believe, as does Bill Lydon, that the future of automation is in open, modular systems with lower design overhead and higher security built in. This is already happening to some extent in the programmable controller space.

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INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION & PROCESS CONTROL

The question remains, though, how end users and interested parties are going to force, coerce, nag, beg or threaten the major automation vendors into playing along. Does O-PAS get a pass? I think it gets a solid “C”.

THE 21ST CENTURY MARKETING BLUES

This is a new continuing section on the trials and tribulations of marketers in the 21st century. In this edition, we are going to talk about social media.

Generally speaking, engineers who have been promoted to marketing think social media is a waste of time. At Emerson, for years, the entire company had a “designated social media executive.” One. This shows a clear misunderstanding of what social media is, and how to use it as a marketing tool. And Emerson is better at social media than most automation companies.

Engineers and industrial marketing executives generally look at marketing as a “push” exercise. You push what you want your customers to know to them, and you determine how successful your “marketing push” is by correlating marketing programs with sales increases.

Successful 21st Century marketing is not a “push” exercise. Since the development of the Internet, the vast amount of information available to customers has made the end users, the

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integrators, and all customers much more powerful than previously. Prior to the Internet, customers needed to get their information from the manufacturers and vendors. What the manufacturer wanted the customer to know they could tell them, and they also had significant ability to keep the customer from knowing what the manufacturer didn’t want them to know.

So, modern marketing is a multidirectional, multidimensional conversation between the vendor and the stakeholders (customers, engineers, purchasing agents, specifying agents, contractors...well you get the picture). Manufacturers marketing people need to be aware of just how much the customers know about the products already. You have to tailor your discussion to the knowledge level of the customer. Some customers may know as much or more than you do. Others, not so much.

What social media did and does is to empower the customers (and your competitors) to learn for themselves what they need to know. Often this means that the customer does their

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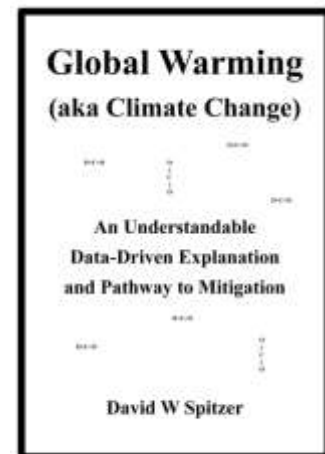
homework and only comes to you when they are ready to buy. Or they come to your competitor instead.

Modern marketing is about how to participate in this conversation between customers and other stakeholders. Next time, we will look at all the social media and talk about how to use each one.

DAVID W. SPITZER WRITES THE BOOK ON CLIMATE CHANGE

For years, I have been arguing with David W. Spitzer, who is the other half of Spitzer and Boyes LLC, the publisher of this newsletter, about global climate change. For years I have told him that the evidence is pretty clear for human-caused global climate change, and he's been resistant. Finally, he decided to do the research and find out what really is happening.

David's book, [Global Warming \(aka Climate Change\): An Understandable Data-Driven Explanation and Pathway to Mitigation](#) is now available as an eBook (USD 9.99 or **Free** with Kindle Unlimited), paperback (USD 19.99), and hardcover (USD 29.99). You can click <Read Sample> on the Amazon.com website to read the first 3+ chapters.



David's findings were surprising to him. Instead of finding out that global warming (actually global climate change) was a hoax, he determined that global climate change, in the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere was found to be the most pressing issue because it will adversely affect human health in approximately a century (not immediately). A century is a very short time on a planetary timescale.

Mitigation to date has helped, but its effect has been similar to that of a small drop in a very large bucket.

However, calculations show that almost complete mitigation can be achieved by developing and applying certain technologies the implementation of which will be virtually transparent to the general population. Stated differently, the accumulation of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere can be mitigated within a few decades without the inconvenience caused by imposing a myriad of rules and restrictions on everyday life. Humans have done this before to

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INDUSTRIAL AUTOMATION & PROCESS CONTROL

mitigate air and water pollution, and we can do it again by making appropriate choices at appropriate times.

From The Preface:

The genesis of this book was driven by my curiosity, and the frustration of seeing people with little or no technical background espouse information about global warming, the validity of which could not be readily determined. On the other hand, seemingly credible sources of information were not believable because their statements contained outright errors or, more often, errors of omission.

There are numerous books available about global warming that range from doomsday scenarios to the justification of the Green New Deal to denial. My quest for information did not uncover a comprehensive understandable source of information that utilized science and data to determine if global warming is real and, if so, provide a rational approach to mitigation.

To the contrary, virtually all the books were biased in some form, typically by misrepresenting data, making untrue statements, incorporating circular arguments, utilizing flawed information, committing errors of omission, and presenting opinion as fact. In contrast, scientific papers typically focused on one aspect of global warming to the exclusion of other important factors. Curious and frustrated, I humbly set out to apply my technical knowledge and forensic experience to uncover the truth about global warming and wrote this book during the journey.



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Flint's Ring of Fire Press. He recently joined Top of the World Publishing, along with Joy Ward, as SFF/Alternate History Editors for their *Novus Mundi Publishing* imprint. Walt “pays it forward” as Vice President and Director of The Heinlein Society.

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