

Switched-on Companies Benefit from Selecting the Right Automation Solutions Provider

Learn how to choose an automation solutions partner that will support your strategic business goals.

In today's business environment, companies face a range of challenges. They must do more with less, yet maintain a competitive advantage – while simultaneously embracing new technology, evolving new products and reducing costs and time to market.

Automation solutions providers can help companies address these challenges. But not all automation solution providers are created equally. Some are simply interested in learning about a company's needs and demands. They do not take that extra step—helping to determine that the solutions they offer will support a company's strategic business goals.

What differentiates an effective automation solutions provider from the rest of the pack? And, what capabilities are important in selecting a solutions provider? We examine the factors in this article.

Overall Adaptability

In general, a successful automation provider offers a range of capabilities to design, manage and implement technical solutions across various industries. Chris Barber, Rockwell Automation® Global Solutions project manager based in Australia, explains that the provider may draw on in-house resources or collaborate with system integrators, contractors or other partners to put together a solution that best meets a customer's overall requirements.

The provider will also have a broad technology platform including scalable automation controllers, general industrial control, motion control and drives products, a rich software suite and open network offerings. The provider's technology must conform to industry standards and meet in-country regulatory requirements making it straight-forward

to implement solutions into local or offshore plants, such as required for OEM businesses.

In addition, the provider should demonstrate expertise in program and project delivery underpinned by proven methodologies. The delivery capabilities should encompass the entire project life cycle, from consulting on project and planning solutions through design and implementation followed by commissioning and system handover.

"An effective automation provider," says Barber, "applies the right team, technology and delivery methods to support a customer's requirements. At Rockwell Automation, for example, we take onboard a customer's issues, develop a solution and put a detailed proposal together. We agree on the terms and conditions of engagement and deliver in line with our project management and delivery methodology. That is our time-proven mechanism for successful projects."

A Framework for Success

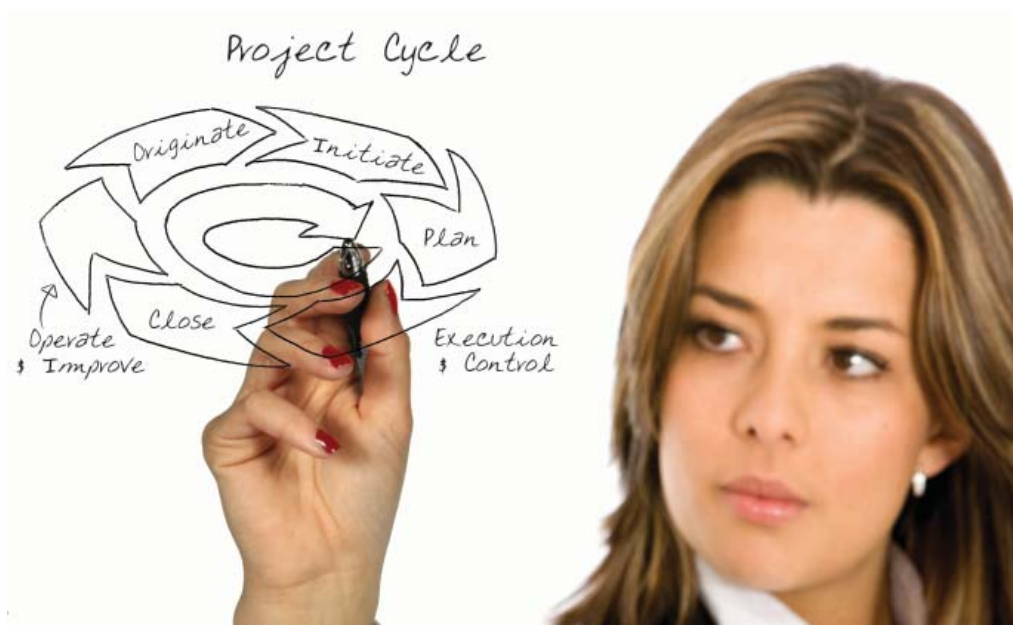
According to Barber, Rockwell Automation adheres to an integrated project management (iPM) methodology

that provides clients with confidence in its ability to understand projects and execute them successfully. The common, global iPM methodology is integrated with Rockwell Automation business systems, programs and policies.

There are methodologies for proposals/estimating, project management and project delivery. Each includes phases of execution. For example, both the proposals/estimating and project management methodologies include phases for initiating, planning, executing, controlling and closing tasks. The project delivery methodology includes phases for designing, implementing and commissioning.

These methodologies are implemented by a project manager working closely with a project delivery team. Typically the team comprises one or more technical leads, designers, developers and other team members, the composition of which will vary as the project progresses from inception through implementation, testing, commissioning and close-out.

Whether the team members are in Australia, Hong Kong or Brazil, they have common tools and templates



THE ASIA PACIFIC CONNECTION

In Asia Pacific, the Rockwell Automation Global Solutions team includes more than 500 employees in more than 50 locations. They are part of a worldwide group of 2,500 collaborative professionals with critical domain expertise.

The Global Solutions Asia Pacific headquarters, which opened in January 2009, is based in Shanghai. In addition to Global Solutions, it houses sales, distribution, R&D, management, customer support and maintenance operations.

available at each stage. These include global tools to manage projects, estimation tools, databases, quality assurance documentation, reports and code libraries, among others.

From a high-level perspective, team members draw on best practices based on previous projects to tailor solutions. They may even apply solution experience from other industries. Having standardised design, engineering, documentation and support approaches for globally delivered projects promotes consistency and quality – as well as mitigates risks – to help deliver solutions on time and on budget.

Leveraging Strengths

Barber explains that as an automation solutions provider, Rockwell Automation draws on particular strengths. These include:

- **Resources.** The company delivers solutions globally while providing local application expertise. In addition to internal team members – such as project managers, automation engineers and information engineers – Rockwell Automation may engage system integrators and domain knowledge experts on behalf of clients.

- **Technology.** The Rockwell Automation Integrated Architecture™, based on the Logix control platform and the FactoryTalk® suite, provides multiple control disciplines in a scalable and information-enabled architecture. Integrated Architecture – along with a product platform including drives, motors, power and energy management equipment, safety systems, sensors and components, among others – helps companies to maximise their system performance, plant-wide information, life cycle optimisation and asset utilisation.

- **Domain Expertise.** Rockwell Automation offers a range of experience in a multitude of industries. In Asia Pacific, for example, the company is collaborating with customers in industries such as waste water, metals, mining, cement and power, among others. Such experience helps companies to increase productivity, lower manufacturing risk, speed time to market and reduce costs of quality and compliance.

- **Services.** Rockwell Automation offers services covering a project's complete life cycle. Integrated project

teams provide global design and support resources. And, local resources are available after project completion. In addition, standard service offerings include extended warranties, callout service contracts, training and TechConnectSM (see page 16). Customised services such as parts management agreements, preventive maintenance, remote services, training vouchers and industrial networking services also are available.

One customer that can attest to the strengths that Rockwell Automation brings to providing automation solutions is Snowy Hydro Limited, owner and operator of the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme in Australia. The company is undertaking a multimillion dollar, seven-year project to upgrade the controls and information systems at seven different power stations. It has established a Relationship Master Agreement with Rockwell Automation to tackle the control systems' overhaul.

According to Barber, Rockwell Automation has drawn on its strengths in collaborating with Snowy Hydro. "From the project's inception there has been a focus on problem solving, whether that be in performing value engineering analysis to determine best use of project budgets, through to resolving the many technical challenges arising in a complex brown-field upgrade environment. There is a high degree of openness and interaction that has established trust between the teams, contributing to a smooth implementation of the solutions."

Darryl Eager, Snowy Hydro manager of Controls Technology, explains that Rockwell Automation went to great lengths to establish and maintain a close working relationship with Snowy. "The project engineering group really impressed our management with their professionalism, knowledge and understanding of our requirements"

The right team, methodologies and tools, in conjunction with the depth and breadth of Rockwell Automation solutions, translate into a winning proposition for Snowy Hydro and other customers, according to Barber.

Key Questions to Pose

Companies that want to collaborate with an automation solutions provider will want to consider asking vendors the following questions – and weighing their

responses carefully:

1. What is the automation company's track record of project deliveries? Are there grounds for confidence based on past successes?
2. Can the company demonstrate robust methodologies applicable to the whole gamut of project activities?
3. Can the company assemble the right team – and domain experts – for the project?
4. Is the automation supplier's approach to projects rigid and contractual or open and collaborative?
5. If there are unexpected problems on a project, what resources can the automation supplier bring to bear to help the company get out of a jam?
6. Can the automation supplier work with your team? Does it demonstrate understanding of your company culture?
7. What sort of local support does the automation supplier offer? For example, will it have to fly in an engineer to help solve a problem?
8. How much of what is being offered by the solutions provider is core to the company? If little is core to the company, what risks does this introduce?

In summary, Barber advises that many companies also consider an automation solutions provider's demonstration of innovation: "As well as having the discipline of methodologies, along with resources, technology, domain expertise and services, automation solutions providers must have creativity and thought processes to deliver solutions that companies will want to embrace – and that will support their business goals." AT