IAA spoke with ABB's Alfred Lee, VP, Global Strategic and Essential Automation Marketing, and Samir Manglani, senior marketing engineer for Essential Automation Marketing, Control Technologies, on the company's extended and essential automation strategies, and how it plans to move forward by targeting specific customer categories. By **Mark Johnston**

The Essentials Of Automation

Oil & Gas

Water/wastewater

The sophistication of control tasks is increasing across all industry sectors, and as such, the mechanisms needed to manage such tasks have to be enhanced to match that level of sophistication. This aspect was apparent when IAA spoke with Mr Lee and Mr Manglani at the company's Singapore office.

From the company's point of view, the industry inherently prefers choice rather than a one size fits all mentality. This is evident from the company's two main offerings for plant control, ie: Extended Automation (System 800xA), and its Essential Automation line including the Freelance Distributed Control System (DCS) and ala-carte Compact Product Suite.

In the case of the company's System 800xA, it is designed as a complete automation solution for large plants, encompassing not just 'essential automation', but extended automation that includes process control, electrical control, safety systems, information management, asset management, video and tele-communication integration, as well as enterprise integration. The system was first developed in 2004, and since then, 10,000 such systems from the company have been installed in over 100 countries. The system's offerings can be summarised as operator effectiveness, automation and power integration, integrated safety, and enterprise asset management.

In the case of Freelance, its main value propositions are ease of use, reliability, scalability, and value for money. It is designed to be a complete system that takes care of the user's essential needs for a DCS. In the case of the Compact Product Suite, the user can pick and choose what automation products they want to use without needing to upgrade an entire system. The devices are also compatible with those from another company, and as such, the suite is designed to be modular and expandable: It is in essence an ala carte menu for customers to pick and choose items in accordance with their needs. The product offerings in the suite include process and safety controllers, field interfaces, HMIs, process recorders, and RTUs.

"The main highlight of Freelance is that it is easy to use, easy to install, easy to learn, easy to commission,

Sugar Production

Cement Industry

easy to backup, easy to maintain and easy to expand. Installation takes less than 10 minutes, while other DCS systems can take up to half a day. Customers can also learn how to use it from our quick start DVD, without the need to attend a separate class. Ease of use is its strength," commented Mr Lee.

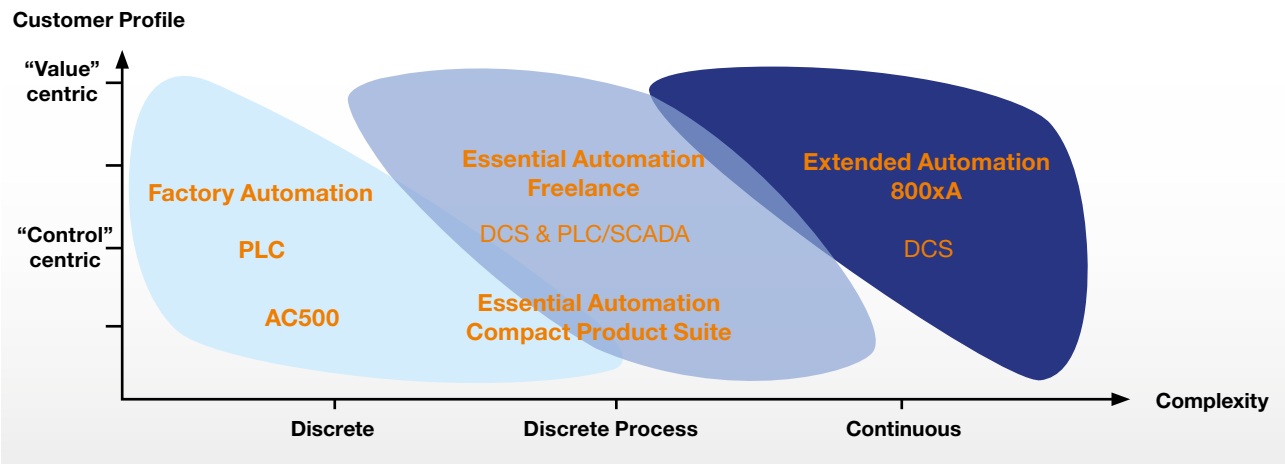
He added: "Engineering is easy as there are lots of pre-defined templates, so customers can just select one from the library, back-ups can be done on a USB, and the space they use is very compact: Ultimately it has good value for money as there is no need for a high-end PC."

He also revealed that the company was launching the Freelance 2013 that will come with a new controller, the AC900F, which is designed to be faster, have more memory, and better functionality.

In terms of compatibility between the company's devices in its Compact Product Suite and another organisation's products, Mr Manglani had this to say: "The whole philosophy is to maintain as open an architecture as possible, since we are giving the customer a choice, it should be able to work with anyone else's system, and the protocols we use are open standard protocols."

Of Control & Values

The company separates customers into two types, namely the 'value' centric customer and the 'control' centric customer. The 'value' customer is defined as a so called visionary customer, and is someone who values and favours a comprehensive solution. They are also willing to pay a premium for a system that gives total enterprise optimised automation strategies. The decision maker behind purchasing such a system is also likely to be senior management, as the investment would be considered more substantial.



Relation between value and control centric customers and level of complexity.

(L-R) Alfred Lee, VP, Global Strategic & Essential Automation Marketing; and Samir Manglani, senior marketing engineer, Essential Automation Marketing, ABB

In the case of the 'control' centric customer, the decision maker is likely to be someone located in the engineering or plant operations department of an end user, or in the engineering department of a system integrator or OEM. The customer might not have a large maintenance team, and desires the system or product to be simple to use, and easy to maintain. In this case, the sales channel to the end user is likely to be via a system integrator or OEM.

"The control centric customer is more hands-on, and they are usually the SME type of companies, possibly one with a smaller engineering team, where they want a simple, easy to use and reliable DCS that runs the plant well. They are basically more price sensitive, and would like a system that is easy to engineer due to limited engineering expertise. That is where we feel Essential Automation comes in, to help the control centric customers, while the Extended Automation is more for the value-centric customers. This is how we segment the customers," said Mr Lee.

"The company's automation platforms basically cover both these customers, ie: value centric and control centric, which looks at the continuous process and the discrete process as well. We are looking at the DCS and the PLC SCADA marketplace. That is where Essential Automation's Freelance DCS and Compact Product Suite come in," he explained. "On the upper end, towards the more value centric customers is where Extended Automation rests, here you can integrate everything together on one platform," he added.

Beyond Territories: Market Expansion

Freelance was originally targeted towards the chemical industry and channel partners. Mr Lee explains how the market has grown since those early days: "In terms of design, we have made it easy to use, principally because the target markets are the system integrators, and also the chemical industry in general. However, we are now involved in a lot of other industries, such as cement, oil and gas, sugar, water, air separation, boiler, and glass industries."

The company's strongest markets are now Germany and China, though when asked about the organisation's growth markets, Mr Manglani said Russia, Latin America, India, Southeast Asia, Middle East, Africa, and the Mediterranean. In terms of sales channels, he stated that the company is looking at distributing Freelance mainly through channel partners and some OEMs as well: "For channel partners, they tend to prefer an easy to use, easy to engineer system, and value for money. The control centric end user customers are also more likely to use channel partners," he explained.

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