

Creating the Future of Motion Control Technology Integration: Opportunities Abound for Those Who Are Prepared

Significant changes in the fluid power industry have been brought about by the emergence of the automation and electro-mechanical control technologies that surround us. As our businesses change over time, and we face different customer and vendor challenges, each of us has to modify our individual company approaches. As an Association, FPDA also has to approach things differently as well.



Fifteen years ago, fluid power distributors looked a fair amount differently than they do today, and probably a fair amount differently than they're going to look fifteen years from now. In the past, a distributor might be able to survive just being an efficient box mover, filling that critical role in the supply chain, getting parts to market and making sure that customers are taken care of. But that's just not enough anymore.

Customers are expecting more service from fewer suppliers. Manufacturers of fluid power products are consolidating, and the fluid power distributor's role is getting broader from a technology, service and product supply perspective. Truly, how much you need to do for a customer is going to be determined on customer-by-customer basis. But you can be guaranteed that as a distributor, you have to do more than in the past or risk being considered obsolete by your customers.

From a technology standpoint, the future is very exciting to me. I think that fluid power distributors are well positioned to adapt and integrate many of the technologies that are in the marketplace for their industrial or mobile customers, and what we've seen so far is that the future is going to be driven by technology. If someone doesn't understand how to integrate with their customers' operations and technologies for their customers, they are going to have a very difficult battle to face.

The transmission of power is really what our customers are looking for. There are many ways to do that, be it hydraulic, pneumatic or electro-mechanical. Depending on the amount of power you want to transmit, when and at what rate, any one of those power transmission methods may solve the basic engineering problem. It's very important for us as distributors and integrators of multiple technologies to understand the benefits as well as the weaknesses of each of the technologies and to be able to choose among them for each particular application, and to be sure that the transmission of the power is efficient and effective. The FPDA Motion & Control Network members understand this very well and will, by and large, be the successful integrators of these technologies in the future.

In the new world that we are preparing for, the keys to success will be open minds, visionary business leaders and engineers. As fluid power distributors look to integrate multiple technologies, it's going to take people with a strong engineering background to achieve that. During a recent visit to the Fluid Power Institute at the Milwaukee School of Engineering, I saw some really excited young students who are ready to embark on their engineering careers. These students understand and have been playing with

electronic products and computers since they could walk and talk. They are ready and willing to adapt with the technology evolution, and are not afraid of it. It is extremely important for a fluid power distributor to recognize that these young people are going to be their future employees, their future customers and their future suppliers. These young professionals are ready to lead the way--they're not shy about showing it off--so it's important for us to understand the important role they will fill and to welcome them with open arms.

The FPDA Motion & Control Network recognizes the significant changes taking place in our industry today, and the rapid convergence of fluid power, automation and motion control technology. If your future lies in any of these areas, the new FPDA is a unique and valuable one-stop center for the tools, knowledge and information you need to grow your business in the coming months. Our upcoming "Opportunities Showcase" at the FPDA Fall Network Symposium will afford our members the opportunity to talk with vendors of a wide range of automation and motion control technologies, and to learn how these technologies can help them provide the best motion and control solutions for their customers.

In addition, we've taken networking to the extreme at our Fall Network Symposium, by creating Peer-to-Peer Networking Forums as an extension to our online E-Networks, opportunities for industry veterans and FPDA Young Executives members to come together to learn from each other, and numerous opportunities for channel partners to meet to discuss mutual goals and plans. In addition, we're providing top-flight business management education by bringing in experts in profitability management, HR development, customer relationship management and end-use market analysis to present actionable ideas for our members' business improvement strategies.

As our industry continues to evolve, so will the only Association dedicated to supporting the success of the fluid power and motion control distributor: The FPDA Motion & Control Network. Visit us at www.fpda.org and see how we're preparing for the future.

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