

CASE STUDY

On the Job—Off Site

Interstates Explores New Approach to Automation Start-Up

Honoring a customer's special request recently led Interstates Control Systems, Inc. (ICSI) to consider adding a new wrinkle to the way they manage an automation system start-up—by providing off-site support during portions of the start-up.

The long-time customer, a Midwestern co-op, was already familiar with Interstates' control systems for soy processing; so, they asked if they could do the checkout portion of the project for their new plant's start-up themselves.

Since checkout of an automated system is typically one of the more time-consuming aspects of a start-up, Interstates was eager to comply. Checkout, commissioning, and start-up can account for 30 to 45% of the total programming hours on a project. Often, the checkout phase by itself (usually 10–20% of total start-up hours) is a particularly inefficient use of time, because the programming team must spend time waiting for devices to be terminated before they can be checked out. This often causes the project to go over budget.

“Customers are generally anxious to complete the process, so they sometimes want us on-site too early, compounding the amount of time spent waiting for others to finish their work,” explains Jeff Miller, director of project management. “Supporting checkout off-site helped the process go as fast as possible, with less travel and use of on-site manhours.”

The ICSI team of Joel Kreykes, Michael DeBoer, and Project Manager Jerry Steenhoek worked closely with the customer to

make sure the trial program went smoothly. After setting up the PCs on site and making sure all control systems equipment was communicating properly, they were able to allow the customer to handle almost all of the checkout and ICSI was able to support the effort from their Sioux Center headquarters.

“At the end of each day, plant personnel sent a list of issues they had found, and we would make sure things were fixed as soon as possible the next morning.” Miller says. “Things went so well with checkout that they even felt comfortable enough to commission and start up the batching system without us being there.”

The result was a savings of on-site manhours and the travel costs associated with it. This helped the start-up portion of this project come in close to budget even though the start-up was carried out over an extended amount of time. This is leading Interstates to explore ways of repeating its success by adapting the off-site approach for other customers less familiar with Interstates systems through the use of other Interstates team members already on-site.

“Customer satisfaction was high because they could checkout at their own pace,” Miller says. “It was a faster, smoother, more efficient checkout...for them and for us.”

For more information about the off-site start-up, please contact Jeff Miller at jeff.miller@interstates.com or 712-722-1663, ext. 151.

From Interstates' Current Connections. ■
