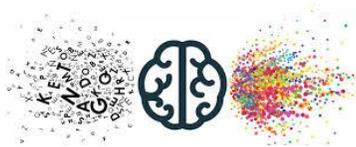


Connections

Do you 'speak-ah' my language?



“The limits of my language, mean the limits of my world.”

- Ludwig Wittgenstein

As New England Drives & Controls constantly strives to become a better asset to our customers, our whitepaper series will feature new technologies or helpful insights that may be pertinent to the reader. It is our sincere hope that this information will be beneficial in both relating, and applying content to your industrial needs.

We hope you find this whitepaper series an enjoyable and informative read.

We always welcome your questions and comments.

Back in the 80's there was a popular song by a group named "Men at Work," that had a line that went something like this:

I bought bread from a man in Brussels, he was six foot-four and full of muscles. I said, "Do you speak-ah my language?" He just smiled and gave me a vegemite sandwich.

I have to admit, although the tune was catchy, and the line kind of funny, it was weird. What in the world is "vegemite?" That quest took me quite a while to find out. (remember; this was before the internet)



I'll save you some time and keystrokes. It is a concentrated yeast extract, that you put on bread. It is kind of like Nutella, only it tastes different. I also learned it is quite popular in Australia. Hey, who am I to judge taste?

Why do I bring this up? Well other than to explain the title of this whitepaper, or pass on a nifty bit of trivia... I got nothing!

As we all know language is the way we all communicate with each other. This becomes much more complicated when we come across someone who speaks a different language. As obvious as this is with humans, it is also true with automation. Sensors installed ten years ago, may not "talk" to newer controllers. Think of all of the protocols out there; Modbus, Profi-net, Ethernet, serial, EtherCAT, and Devicenet, just to name a few. Wikipedia lists 87 complete protocols, not counting off-shoots of some of them. These competing protocols sometimes make upgrading or interfacing new components difficult if not altogether impossible!



Star-Trek had a device called a “universal translator.” It looked like a microphone, and as you spoke into it, it translated whatever you said into whatever language was needed. The year in the episode that used it was 2260. Like most technologies in Star Trek, we have already surpassed it. Amazingly I have an app on my smart phone, that does this.

Unfortunately, there is no smartphone app for protocol conversion just yet. But there are some devices that can easily do this machine to machine translation. Interestingly enough, they are called, you guessed it; Protocol Converters. The leader in this market is Red Lion, and they can talk whatever automation language your equipment speaks.

One benefit of this “magic box” is that you can still use older components utilizing older serial protocols with newer networked components. You can easily also convert from one network protocol to another. This secret can save money when the need to update equipment comes around and prevents you from getting stuck having to buy components from a specific manufacturer, as their device is the only one that can talk to your device on the line. Protocol conversion frees you from this and could possibly save you money.



Some manufacturers build this propriety into their products, preventing you from straying from their brand. Even when their brand may not be as good or as inexpensive as better or comparable units. Don't get fettered to this type of trap, and if you have fallen into one, at least you now know you may have a way out!

Red Lion also has HMI units that incorporate protocol conversion, offering more versatility and consolidation, perhaps saving you more.

We are proud to distribute solutions to simplify and streamline projects for industrial automation by several of our solutions partners. Let us know how New England Drives & Controls can help.

-Peter Lavoie (Engineering Manager)



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