

Reduce HMI interface development times

The Movicon.NExT Project Builder provides an ideal environment to develop the HMI aspect of a project alongside the control / PLC based core automation functionality. This saves time and adds convenience for system integrators and machine builders alike.

Developing applications to manage machines can increase in cost if – as is usually the case - the machine automation and graphical user interface or human machine interface (HMI) are dealt with separately. However, by developing them in parallel efficiency is achieved and, significantly, the interface is ready to be used in the testing phases.

"Most systems designers will appreciate that combining automation and HMI development will be efficient," says Carl Nash, Technical Director of Products4Automation (P4A), the UK and Ireland distributor of Movicon SCADA. "However, it is very difficult to do in practise because you naturally tend to get stuck into the automation, always wanting to develop the next step while the previous one is still fresh in your mind."

The developers of Movicon, Progea in Italy was founded on technical innovation and, applying the same sort of thought processes, decided to try automating HMI development. The result is Project Builder, a product that could revolutionise the process of automation and HMI development.

Project Builder is native to the Movicon development environment and is used as a tool to create HMI graphical project pages automatically. The Project Builder permits you to manage the resources of Movicon.NExT (the company's latest SCADA platform) and automatically configure HMI graphics. It does this using Visual Studio, an integrated development environment (IDE) from Microsoft, within which a Wizard can be created to modify Movicon.NExT - based projects.

"Project Builder automatically creates ready-to-use HMI screen pages," explains Carl. "It is a software compiler that instantly creates the basic HMI pages, including manual commands, parameter fields and alarms based on specific configuration files or those read by the controlling PLC (programmable logic controller)."

There is then a second function within Project Builder that can fit the basic pages into page templates, so that each page has a similar look and feel. For instance, specific types of information can always be in the same place and consistent colours, typefaces and sizes can be specified, while a preferred method of alarm indication can be chosen.

Most automation systems have to be adapted from time to time to meet new demands, so Project Builder has been designed to make modification easy. It is the work of moments to add buttons, change colours, insert new icons and adapt graphics.

The Movicon.NExT Project Builder enables simple customisation of and changes to all tags and alarms; whilst screens can be created, modified and deleted with equal ease. Toolbox objects can be inserted, modified or deleted on screen, as can strings and library symbols. Parameterisation files can be created, adapted or deleted quickly.

"I particularly like that languages can be added and deleted," enthuses Carl. "This is important in our increasingly global market, where a system built in, say, the UK may be installed at a site in Italy and need to communicate with systems in China and North America."

To date, system development costs and time have been prone to overrun for many systems engineers and integrators. Project Builder can bring them under far greater control because the HMI software largely develops itself, leaving the engineers to concentrate on the development of the machine's automation. Further, the HMI software is ready and available for the vital testing stage of the project.

Because the project engineer can dedicate more time to developing the machine automation and less to running tests, they have the opportunity to produce better results quicker and at lower cost.

Photo Caption: The Project Builder permits you to manage the resources of Movicon.NExT and automatically configure HMI graphics.

About Products4Automation

Products4Automation (P4A) is a specialist supplier of new and innovative software and hardware solutions to the UK market. Product ranges available from P4A include the latest touch-screen HMI's and flat panel PCs, SCADA software and plug-ins, a wide range of SCADA enabled hardware, Alarm plug-in software for large automation systems, and a full range of Production Intelligence software solutions.

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