

Increase production flexibility and efficiency with better batch management

As manufacturers across a broad range of industries look to optimise batch management, ease of control implementation and recipe functionality is a key concern. In-line with this requirement Progea's Movicon.NExT SCADA software now provides advanced management modules that make it far easier to create and edit complex batch processes.

Batch management and recipe execution are terms most closely associated with the process industries, but they are now becoming increasingly relevant to discrete manufacturing and assembly operations as well. As operational targets include increased flexibility for customisation, without compromising on productivity or quality, the importance of batch management is coming to the fore.

"Most processes and assembly manufacturing tasks involve batches of product, distinct in terms of their batch code, even if the product is identical," says Carl Nash, technical director at Products4Automation, the UK and Ireland distributor for the Progea range of products. "This allows for small changes and variations to be introduced quickly into a fast-moving production environment, enabling plants to efficiently produce more customised goods."

Movicon NExT offers a number of advanced features, built in as standard, that are ready to use and easily configurable, including powerful batch management functionality. The module allows the user to create 'recipes' for products and adapt them quickly and easily, without having to re-code the control programming. There is a user-friendly environment to create new recipes and allow for simple control by an operator, even over a complicated process with many variables.

The production recipes enable users to manage data archives containing working process parameters relating to manufactured products. When selecting the desired product, the parameter values relating to all of the production variables are loaded.

"This drives up a plant's flexibility by making it easy to load and execute recipes for products that might have different areas of customisation," explains Carl. "All of the changeover's required on the production line to accommodate that customisation are handled automatically as part of the batch management process, significantly reducing changeover time and increasing productivity."

Production recipes are object oriented and use the same recording techniques performed by the Movicon data loggers. Being object oriented and with wizard assistance, recipe management within Movicon couldn't be easier. The user simply creates a 'recipe' object and assigns it with the necessary variables, and then the wizard function automatically generates the recipe's display window graphics with user interface.

This is completely customisable by setting various properties such as styles and colours. As an alternative, the simple recipe display window object can be displayed in grid format to provide a more traditional environment for managing production data.

"The Progea products are easy to use. They have intuitive graphics and offer sophisticated control over batch production processes," comments Carl. "It is the best of both worlds for getting the 'right recipe'. Once set up, plant operators can easily manage multiple product variations and execute product changeover processes at the touch of a button to help maximise production output."

With increasingly competitive global markets, a recognisable trend in production is for batches of fewer products with increased levels of customisation, potentially right down to the so-called 'batch size one', where every product is tailored to individual requirements. The increased flexibility required by this new manufacturing paradigm can only be facilitated by effective batch management strategies, but if that comes at the expense of increased software coding time, then we need to make sure it doesn't become self-defeating.

With powerful yet simple to use batch management and recipe editing features such as those offered by Movicon.NExT, operations managers and their systems integrators can focus with confidence on strategic production objectives.

Photo Captions:

Photo 1:

Progea's Movicon.NExT SCADA software now provides advanced management modules that make it far easier to create and edit complex batch processes.

Photo 2:

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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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