

Strength in numbers

Partnerships and collaboration are the foundation that enables end-users and suppliers to develop complete solutions for industrial automation and beyond

The market for industrial automation products is continuing to skyrocket, with ever more ambitious demands for advanced, data-driven solutions. To thrive in this sector, it is more favorable for automation specialists to develop strong collaborations with other industry players. Groups that rely on industrial automation open networking standards deliver high-quality, interoperable products and are able to take advantage of an increasing number of automation opportunities.

Thomas Burke, Global Strategic Advisor at the CC-Link Partner Association (CLPA), explains why teamwork makes the dream work for automation vendors.

The manufacturing sector is rapidly evolving, as data-oriented solutions are enabling the creation of a holistic approach to production activities that increases flexibility, efficiency and productivity. Companies can implement digital manufacturing approaches by implementing interconnected, multi-component automation ecosystems.

These systems can generate, share and process key data within different parts of an enterprise, merging information technology (IT) and operational technology (OT), to obtain a comprehensive and actionable insight into all processes. Ultimately, knowledge is power in the digital era. For example, the current trends are driving the integration of plant operations and business management systems. Predictive maintenance, real-time process control, just-in-time manufacturing and quality assurance are only a few of the possibilities opened up by this approach.

This digital transformation is influencing the automation requirements of manufacturing and processing businesses. In effect, they are moving away from the conventional approach of purchasing individual automation hardware or software components and toward solutions that can be more easily integrated, supporting longer-term digital transformation strategies.

As a result, for automation vendors to succeed and thrive in this fast-changing market, it is necessary to adapt and address this new implementation paradigm. Achieving this as a single brand is particularly challenging and requires substantial, long-term investment. Establishing strong partnerships with like-minded, industry-leading automation specialists however is certainly proving to be a more effective strategy.

Open networking and collaboration

Firstly, a key opportunity for automation specialists lies in the use of open standards. These are essential for organizations and suppliers to successfully work together. Furthermore, the standards should be widely adopted. In effect, technical innovations from a business value perspective are only valuable if they are deployed and adopted by both suppliers and end users alike.

For example, doing simple things, such as printing from any application, has been simplified through open standards and a standard application programming interface (API). Applications don't have to know anything about printing and all the different types of printers because we have a standard API that just works. The same is true for industrial automation. Having open standards allows us to achieve the impossible.

Furthermore, end-users who are trying to meet their automation goals can greatly benefit from plug-and-play interoperability between multiple vendor products. Also, end-users are no longer locked into a single vendor solution. They want to be able to use products from multiple suppliers, essentially leveraging best-of-breed and using the products that address their requirements. Hence, suppliers must make sure that their solutions work with others seamlessly.

Finally, data-driven, converged applications are all about providing secure and reliable interoperability, taking data from a multitude of disparate devices and converting it into useful information for enterprise aware applications. Ultimately, there is strength in numbers for industrial automation specialists.

Accessing new opportunities

By offering holistic solutions with compatible and interoperable products, key strategic collaborations among vendors can help the individual companies to access additional market niches and support a wide range of applications. Partners can examine the latest technological advances and trends together as well as act to shape the future of industrial automation with state-of-the-art solutions. In particular, it is possible to develop leading products that support data-oriented applications and the IT/OT convergence. Furthermore, they can help maximize the reach and effectiveness of education, training and awareness tasks.

Partnering with one company is highly beneficial, but joining a network of industry players can do even more, as it can offer a synergistic effect on the possible advantages. A network of automation specialists that has been growing since its foundation is the CLPA, which now has 3,800 partner companies worldwide and more than 2,100 certified products available from over 340 manufacturers.

Proven frameworks

The CLPA is an international organization, whose members comprise the world's leading factory automation companies, with the aim to advance open, interoperable information and communications technologies. Partner companies are given comprehensive support in the creation of new products ranging from access to the

latest technical data and specifications sheets on the CC-Link family of network technologies to conformance tests and technical support. This also enables them to produce factory automation solutions based on the latest developments for industrial communications such as Time-Sensitive Networking (TSN).

Another highly successful example of a collaborative organization of technology partners is Mitsubishi Electric's e-F@ctory Alliance. This global initiative brings together over 900 manufacturers of industrial components, specialist system integrators and software providers, which have introduced more than 20,000 systems.

The members cooperate to offer flexible, optimized solutions for Industry 4.0 applications, such as the seamless integration of IT and OT. Ultimately, the e-F@ctory Alliance is committed to bringing businesses forward on their journey to digital manufacturing with high-speed connectivity, reliable data and precise control - all deployed using tailored, robust and proven technologies.

By joining a collaborative network of industry-leading technology providers, companies can offer data-transparency solutions for a wide range of industries and applications that are easy to implement while incorporating the latest advances in technology. This means that customer needs can be met with high-quality, easy to use and cost-effective systems. As a result, automation vendors can enhance their competitive edge in the market.

To find out more about CLPA and e-F@ctory Alliance and how to join both initiatives, please visit the [CLPA](#) and [Mitsubishi Electric](#) websites respectively.

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Captions:

Image 1: The e-F@ctory Alliance brings together over 900 manufacturers of industrial components, specialist system integrators and software providers, which have introduced more than 20,000 systems.

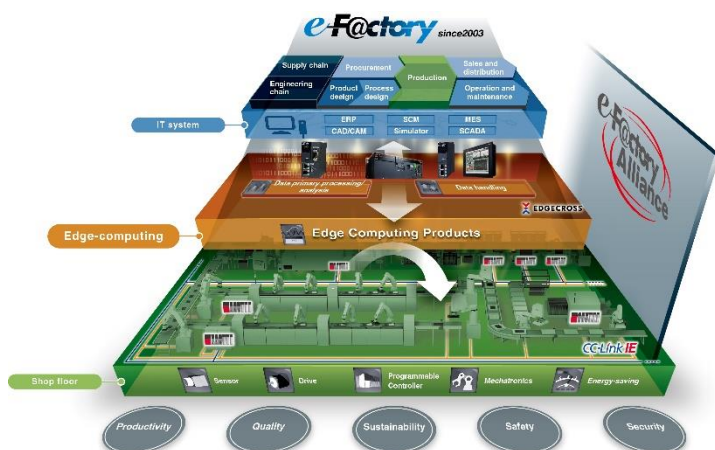


Image 2: The manufacturing sector is rapidly evolving, as data-oriented solutions are enabling the creation of a holistic approach to production activities that increases flexibility, efficiency and productivity. (© iStock/metamorworks)



Keywords: Time-Sensitive Networking, CC-Link IE TSN, TSN, CLPA, e-f@ctory, Industry 4.0, IIoT, industrial automation.

About The CC-Link Partner Association (CLPA)

The CLPA is an international organisation founded in 2000, now celebrating its 20th Anniversary. Over the last 20 years, the CLPA has been dedicated to the technical development and promotion of the CC-Link family of open automation networks. The CLPA's key technology is CC-Link IE TSN, the world's first open industrial Ethernet to combine gigabit bandwidth with Time Sensitive Networking (TSN), making it the leading solution for Industry 4.0 applications. Currently the CLPA has almost 3,800 member companies worldwide, and more than 2,000 compatible products available from over 340 manufacturers. Around 30 million devices using CLPA technology are in use worldwide.

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