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Easy remote access via Internet

Thanks to an industrial VPN router that mounts to a DIN rail in the machine control cabinet, this maker of end-of-line packaging machinery saves big on tech support costs.

By Pat Reynolds, VP Editor

AFA Systems out of Toronto is a leading provider of Custom Designed Automation Solutions for a variety of applications including case packing and palletizing. Through the innovative use of servo drives and automation, AFA creates an environment where machine parameters become part of the packaging recipe. Each time a different product comes to the machine, the packaging patterns and mechanical stops are changed via touchscreen and the PLC program. AFA finds it makes good financial sense to employ the COSY (COmmunication made eaSY) system from eWon in their machine design. It's an industrial VPN router that offers easy remote access across the Internet to machines out in the field.

According to David Langen, AFA's Electrical Engineer, "In the past, the complexity and importance of each machine required commissioning at the customer facility. New systems required two engineering technicians; one who specialized in the mechanics of the machine and another with background in the automation application. Invariably, the automation specialist spent much of the time waiting for and reacting to mechanical changes."

The eWON device allows AFA Systems to send just a single mechanically focused person out for the startup. "It takes 1-3 weeks to commission a new machine. With travel costs running in the thousands of dollars per trip, it just made sense for us to apply the COSY system to our machines and do the final automation tuning from our location here in Toronto," says Langen.

But new machine applications aren't the only use of eWON at AFA. According to Langen, "Our experience with eWON has been so positive that we regularly offer the product to customers requesting field visits. When a customer calls, I will give them a quick estimate of the cost of a trip to their area, which includes airfare, rental car, hotel and living expenses. I then provide the option of sending a COSY system along with wiring and installation instructions. The installation is simple and the eWON

alternative is always a better value for the customer. We can almost always make the needed adjustment from here.”

The COSY system allows the AFA engineering team to offer better service to the customer. Langen explains. “Typically, our work onsite is distracting to the user. When our guys are on site there is a subtle pressure to accommodate them by shutting down the line so they can complete their work. Often the line just can’t be easily shut down, so the engineer just waits for the end of shift or a planned work stoppage. With the eWON system, the engineer can simply wait for the best time for the customer, all the while performing other productive work.”

With three years and over 40 eWON systems worth of experience, AFA Systems has noted a number of advantages to using the devices. “For starters, the eWON system has a unique methodology for communicating over the Internet” says Langen. “We can easily access our customer’s system within a matter of minutes. Customer networks remain secure and the costly involvement of the customer IT department is minimized. For smaller plants with very little infrastructure, eWON allows the customer to avoid calling in experts to make things work.”

Langen points out another important driver for the automation systems providers. “The cost of supporting programming software has grown to the point that many smaller users can’t keep up. Using the eWON system solves that problem because we are able to update the users program with our own software. They avoid the hassles and ongoing costs of maintaining the most up to date software. Our engineer simply accesses their system, makes the needed changes and puts them back online in a matter of minutes. The whole thing is a win for everyone.”

Companies in this article:

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- »AFA Systems Ltd.
- »eWON



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