



Advantage Customer Testimonial Engineering Manager – Utility Cable Manufacturer

“When it comes to fitting solutions to needs nobody does it better for us than Advantage Industrial Automation”

“Located in northwest Georgia, we make building and utility wire and high-voltage products for customers found throughout the U.S. and the world. Almost a fifth of American homes are fitted with the company’s building wire products.

The company is more than a half century old. It seems like it’s been almost that long since Advantage has been working with us. Actually, they kept pushing to get a foot in our door for many years before we began a business relationship with them around 1998. And, boy, am I happy we finally saw the light, because what they bring to the table is so much better, in terms of pricing, product quality, service follow-up and innovative thinking, than any of their competitors.

We used to be heavily saturated in PCs through Allen Bradley but we wanted something else. My Advantage Sales Rep and I were brainstorming tech concepts that nobody was implementing: we thought of putting a JAVA virtual machine into the control equipment because it gives you most of the PC’s power without the PC’s first cost or maintenance expense. Some balked at it, but Advantage managed to convince Schneider to build something that met our needs. That’s how we got into using Modicon PLCs.

That’s a textbook example of how far AIA will go to provide a solution for us. While this project was the one major technological innovation AIA supplied, they’ve brought us superior products that are innovative from a market penetration perspective, including cross-platform items which let multiple vendors access our control network.

AIA will do for us what a systems integrator won’t. We had two goals in mind when we went to them: obtain a controls system that was unfailingly reliable and didn’t create the maintenance nightmares that PCs bring; and pull data off the shop floor from the PLC to a mainframe system database without any filtering. This required something out of the ordinary, and systems integrators generally give you what’s been tried and true, something they know how to do. But their solutions are safe and not innovative. AIA thinks and acts outside that box.

Because we’ve had some management turnover in recent years, the new leaders have wanted to see that kind of data retrieval happen, so AIA’s approach was very beneficial to me, and to the company.

Some manufacturers and their reps insist that you use the solution that’s dictated by their product’s customary usage. AIA doesn’t take that square-peg-in-a-round-hole approach. If an off-the-shelf product doesn’t match the need, they’ll take it back to the manufacturer and get an agreement to modify the product for the necessary integration with our systems.



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AIA is so heavily invested in our success that they're not afraid to argue with us on technical points to arrive at the best solution. That gives us the push we need to improve. They're so familiar with the product and the process that it's common for their people to talk with our machine operators to get it right. In fact, they talk easily with people at all levels of our organization. You know, it's funny. Our boss laughs when he tells how AIA's salespeople are just a bunch of frustrated engineers: they don't have anything to play with at their office so they come here to play with our stuff.

Their style creates the right balance with us. They'll make suggestions that drive decisions, but they don't participate in the decisions. They look beyond the sale to do the service – and even beyond that to anticipate future needs. Deadlines are no problem with them. If anything, when things get slowed up it's been a lapse on our part, where management decides to delay a decision without regard to its impact on our partners' schedules, so we may wind up having six weeks instead of 12 to complete a project. That's when AIA will get on the horn with us to try to prod it along.

They'll help us fix things before a crisis develops, too. For instance, one time we got some panels in with faulty air conditioners. It was wintertime, so it was 6-8 weeks before we used them. AIA came right in, took out the defective equipment and ordered new pieces for us.

We didn't just reap the benefits we hoped for and expected from AIA. We've had several which are more apparent in indirect, but no less important ways. Because we get more and better data out of the plant quickly we can schedule operations better. When we do that, we get less downtime.

Because product quality is so good, we can run systems on a near-to-spec basis instead of over-spec to minimize quality problems. We have an upgraded energy management system through Square D, but the efficiencies AIA has brought keeps us more current and more accurately in tune to where we use energy.

We get value on cost with lower upfront pricing and better performance along the way. I honestly can't think of any instance where they've fallen short of what we needed. They know what it takes to get a large complicated piece of machinery up and running. The only complaint I've ever heard was when some of the guys said they were slow to answer a question during the start-up phase for equipment. But that meant they responded in 3-4 hours instead of one!

To put things in a nutshell, AIA's probably the best technology vendor calling on us in terms of the breadth and depth of product knowledge. Their guys could probably Greenfield controls in a plant right up there with any of the best consulting firms."