



Case Study

When hygiene products and water services company Nalco consolidated operations at its Weavergate works in Northwich, Cheshire, Astec Solutions enabled the site's systems to cope with greatly increased volumes.



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Cleaning Up A Consolidation

Background

The Weavergate site of Nalco, a subsidiary of Ecolab, the water, hygiene and energy technologies and services company, is located in the chemical industry cluster in Northwich, Cheshire. The facility makes bleach-based products for personal hygiene. When the parent company decided to consolidate the activities of two factories at the Weavergate site, Astec Solutions was called in to help it to increase its capacity and, at the same time, to upgrade the legacy system to one that could cope with contemporary demands. In particular, the company was seeking to extend the existing, 10-year-old batch execution system to cover the new product lines in the extended production floor.

Analysis, prognosis, prescription

Plant and equipment was transferred from the vacated site near Stoke on Trent with output at the Northwich site expected to increase by at least 50%. As some of the equipment at the Weavergate plant had been mothballed in the years before the consolidation it was possible to extend the existing batch execution system without having the expense of buying new licences. However, the system was not completely up to date and did not have the capacity to meet contemporary demands and increased output levels.

At the heart of Nalco's production operations at Weavergate are its mixing vessels. The nature of the products and their ingredients means that precise control of mixing and the manufacturing process right through to packaging and despatch is essential.



Solution and implementation

"Virtualisation was key," said Andy Tripp, Managing Director of Astec Solutions. "The customer did not have an appetite for high investment on its operating and batch execution systems so Astec virtualised the server systems and the production clients, and brought them together on a single, high availability, virtualised platform. They are now located in a secure area in a server rack, on site."

Astec updated the PLC, SCADA and Batch Execution applications, in parallel with the relocation of the additional production equipment: as Nalco got its new mechanical functionality in place Astec worked alongside, installing and commissioning the software that would make it function.

"We worked with the customer through a very challenging timeline," said Tripp. "We kept downtime to a minimum by completing stages one piece at a time, rather than trying to achieve everything all in one go. We got each item operational before moving on to the next." Minimising downtime meant that crucial sales and customer relationships were maintained. Astec was also able to help to control the costs involved in the upgrade by identifying efficiencies within the existing system.

"Virtualisation enabled us to leverage the existing system, which will enable the customer to use it for some time to come," Tripp explained. "The system Nalco has now is supportable, maintainable and extendable, and has full documentation. I'm happy to say that we have developed a very good working relationship with the company."

Outcomes

The consolidated site in Northwich has been converted to increase production by 50%.

The legacy system has been virtualised, extended and moved onto new servers, located in a more secure and applicable environment. It is now more straight forward to support and enables new product introductions to occur more easily.

A challenging timetable was achieved and downtime minimised by working in close collaboration with the client, installing and commissioning systems while production equipment was relocated from the redundant site to Weavergate.