

High speed meets high tech

Ray Neel isn't old, but his machine-control career bridges the mechanical-to-integrated-controls gap.

Neel is controls engineering manager at Roberts PolyPro, a Charlotte, NC, OEM that builds packaging machines for copackers and package converters. They are big, high-speed units and the mechanical versions consisted of "one big, honkin' motor and all these gears," he recalls. Changeovers tended to be workday nightmares for users. Re-timing servos with the push of a button is an operator's dream.

The more complicated the machine, the more valuable the transition to superior controls technology. An example is a two-piece cardboard open-basket carrier built

by Roberts PolyPro. The system stretches 60 to 80 feet and administers 40 shots of glue as it marries a six-pack carrier to another piece of cardboard with graphics. Bottled water suppliers, soft drink companies and breweries are the primary users of the machines, which output more than 400 pieces a minute.

The first new-generation machine built by Roberts relied on an Allen-Bradley SLC 5/04 for logic control and Indramat motion controls at the drive level. The latest machine, a 22-axis unit built for Heineken and capable of converting 500 pieces a minute, features A-B's ControlLogix programmed with RSLogix software for combined motion and logic control. Neel also made use of Visual Basic for Applications to slash engineer-



High speed, complex motion and logic are managed by a single controller for this two-piece cardboard converter of open-basket carriers from Roberts PolyPro. Source: Rockwell Automation.

ing and debugging time by incorporating reusable code in the application.

"The biggest benefit for end-users is simplicity," explains Neel. "With one processor, if you ever have a problem, you know where it is," and that translates to less downtime.

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