

West Cheshire Business Insider

Talking Skills with



Andrew Cann –
Managing Director

What does GroupCytek do?

Our business is automation systems integration. What does that mean?! Well, there are different types of software. There is the type of software that you use on your laptop, for example (to access the web, Microsoft office etc.) and there is industrial software. Industrial software runs on bespoke hardware rather than a laptop, is designed for an industrial environment and it's used in any major processing industry. Oil and gas, petro-chemicals, the pharmaceutical industry, food production, car manufacture - all use it. Simply speaking it contributes to the machines or process being run in a safe and repeatable manner to produce the end product. In broad terms, in the a process or manufacturing environment an operator manages the process from a control room via a computer interface displaying images of vessels, temperatures, pumps, valves and levels. These images give him / her information on what the process is doing at any one time. The software controls the process to make the product. Our business develops and delivers automation systems to customers to control their manufacturing process or implement improvements using control systems.

If you're still not there, here's an example of what we've done. You've probably seen a Ribena bottle in the supermarket? Well, we upgraded the process part of a Ribena bottling line in 2013. The



existing control system was obsolete and prone to breaking down, this was affecting productivity. We installed new control system hardware and software and implemented improvements to increase productivity, improve product quality and reduce waste. How the process works is that a concentrate syrup is mixed with water, pasteurised, cooled and then bottled. If you consider the volume of Ribena manufactured, accuracy and quality are very important as although being precise may only save a couple of millilitres per bottle, on a bigger scale over time this can save the business thousands of pounds. So our automation systems help to ensure a company's productivity leading to a more efficient business and improved bottom line.

So how does your business differ to others in the automation systems integration field?

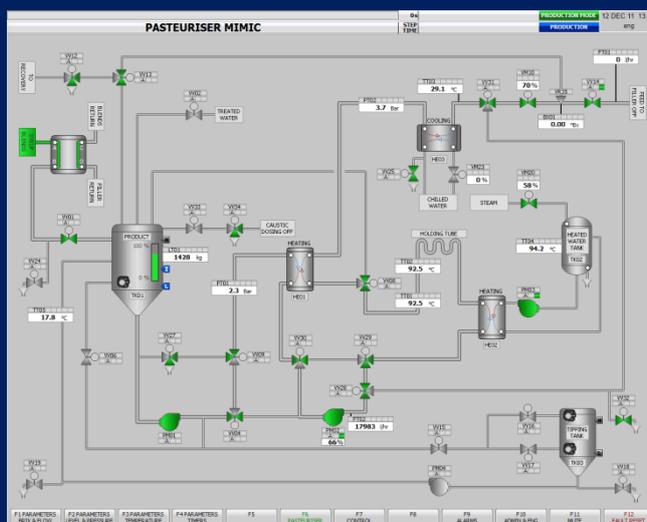
There are a number of large companies who manufacture their own control system hardware and software and sell it to customers. As a smaller independent company we can use any of the products available on the market and we have a lower cost base and so can offer a more flexible solution to our customers at a reduced cost. Our business delivers a mixture of consulting, fixed price projects and managed services. A key benefit of being a smaller company is our flexibility; we can work on our customer's sites, where the process manufacturing plant resides, or at our offices.



How has the business got to where it is today?

The business was started in 1993. Since then we have experienced steady organic growth. We work across a number of process industries and this has helped minimise the impact of periods of recession. Our head office used to be in Farnham, Surrey but as part of our business strategy we moved it to Winsford in 2014. Originally our focus was engineering services biased with the systems suppliers who were based in the South-East of the country. We have developed our business and now it is primarily End User focussed but we still work for the major systems suppliers. This gives us a broader platform of opportunities. We also now focus more on fixed price work. At any one time we can be delivering control systems solutions and services to as many as 20 customers - but this figure fluctuates.

We've managed quite well through periods of recession, partly because we are self-funding. During periods of change, particularly growth, cash flow is important to small businesses and in the most recent recession banks have made it more difficult to borrow money, being self-funding we have avoided the need for this. As it currently stands, our turnover is around £3 million and 80-90% of our business is UK based.



What different staff do you have?

Well our business has an overhead / management side and a delivery side. Our overhead / management function comprises myself as Managing Director our Engineering Director and then additional staff providing Operations support, Accounting and Finance. The delivery side of our business comprises approximately 35 Engineers who report to myself or our Engineering Director. We work UK wide, consequently our Engineers can be based in our office or, as it predominantly the case currently, working at sites across the UK.

What skills do you see your business needing more of in the future?

We're going to need more control and automation engineers. We currently have no female engineers in the company which is a negative, attracting engineers into the company is always difficult and as importantly, our age profile is getting 'greyer', this is an industry wide problem and we are looking at what we need to do to address this. We're not very good at attracting young people into engineering. I think we've suffered in automation particularly, in the 90s Engineers with

good IT and electrical skills were attracted into IT, a period of incredible growth in that industry. We've taken on a female Engineering graduate here for a year to trial a course as we want to help get younger people more interested in automation and control. We need to explore how we can develop strategies to improve engagement in the future with women and young people.

Have you worked with local schools at all?

We've worked a bit with Leftwich High School in the past and we did two work experience placements with them. We put a little piece of work together where the young person had to write a small programme that started a pump, opened a valve and filled a tank. They also put a graphic together so they could see this happening. Leftwich doesn't do work experience any more so that's stopped. But we would be happy to explore re-kindling this activity as young people are the future of any industry!

Do you think schools should do work experience?

Yes, and we'd be willing to have more young people carry out placements with us. The employment opportunities for young people are more varied today, it can be mind boggling for them to decide, work placements give young people an opportunity to explore the work environment.

Our business is a great example of a job no one really thinks about. How does the Lucozade sport end up in the bottle you see in the supermarket? Few people know or even ask the question!



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