Flurry of Innovations

Automation and control manufacturers launched more new products and solutions in 2004 than in recent years. As a result, Control Engineering’s editors evaluated a larger pool of nominees to choose the 40 winners of the 18th annual Editors’ Choice Awards.

Jim Montague, Mark T. Hoske and Control Engineering staff

Stock market averages and economic indexes aside, one of the best gauges of the recent industrial sector upswing in the U.S. and globally has to be that many control and automation manufacturers released more new products and solutions in 2004 than they have in recent years—a flurry of innovation.

In fact, at several of 2004’s major tradeshows, suppliers that had been exhibiting one, two or no new items previously were suddenly launching a half a dozen or more new products at each event. “2004 turned out to be a great year for the manufacturing industry, both economically and in terms of product innovation. So many great products really hit their stride this past year, in terms of the criteria against which we judge our award winners, that we decided to increase the number of awards given out this year to 40—up from 35 last year,” say David Greenfield, Control Engineering’s editorial director.

Control Engineering’s editors again evaluated hundreds of nominees based on service to the industry, technological advancement, and market impact to select the 40 winners of the 18th annual Editors’ Choice Awards. Readers should be aware that winning products are not necessarily awarded in their initial year of release. Some are technically advanced enough, but don’t have enough impact or deliver significant enough service to their industry until a greater level of adoption occurs a year or two later, or for innovative attributes of later versions.

“Throughout the year, Control Engineering editors cover thousands of products in the North American print edition, at our www.controleng.com Web site, and in our monthly and weekly e-mailed newsletters. Each year, editors review that coverage for products, solutions, and services with exceptional market impact, technological advancement, and service to the industry,” says Mark Hoske, Control Engineering’s editor-in-chief. “The editors nominate what we believe to be the best products based on those criteria, and then cast votes for them. Selecting Control Engineering Editors’ Choice Award winners isn’t getting any easier, especially with the increasing amount of innovation serving the market.”

Following the Editors’ Choice awards, Control Engineering’s subscribers again are being asked to vote for their own favorites from among the editors’ 40 selections to determine the winners of the second annual Engineers’ Choice Awards, choosing the top winner in each of eight product categories. These eight winners will be revealed during the Editors’ Choice awards ceremony, held during National Manufacturing Week, March 7-10, in Chicago.

Control Engineering’s editorial categories posting awards this year include: Embedded Control; Human-Machine Interface; Instrumentation and Process Sensors; Machine Control and Discrete Sensors; Motors, Drives, and Motion Control; Networks and Communications; Process and Advanced Control; and Software and Information Integration.

Frank J. Bartos, David Greenfield, Mark T. Hoske, Dick Johnson, Jeanine Katzeli, Vance J. VanDoren, and Michael Babb also contributed to this article.
Wireless transmitters go where hardwiring can’t

Honeywell Process Solutions’ XYR 5000

To facilitate automated monitoring in remote, hazardous, or hard-to-access locations, XYR 5000 wireless transmitters from Honeywell Process Solutions can measure and communicate process variables online without requiring wiring or external power. The firm reports that XYR 5000 gives users the flexibility to gather information about process and assets in places where traditional hardwired transmitters would be too costly, difficult, or time-consuming to implement.

XYR 5000 includes devices for accurately monitoring gauge pressure, absolute pressure, temperature, and ultrasonic noise, as well as for detecting steam and gas leaks. The line also includes an analog input interface for adding wireless capabilities to wired devices.

These instruments wirelessly transmit measurements to a base radio networked to a control system or data acquisition device, such as a recorder or PC. Each base radio accepts signals from up to 50 transmitters. The base radio also interfaces with Honeywell’s PC-based Wireless Configuration Tool, which offers real-time indication, trending, reporting, and configuration capabilities. The base radio is available with either Modbus or a 4-20mA analog signal output for flexible communications.

In addition, XYR 5000 transmitters feature three-to-five-year battery life and a low-battery alarm. Self-checking software and hardware continuously monitor instrument operation to identify and report sensor or device parameters that are out of specification. Advanced radio technology employing frequency hopping spread spectrum (FHSS) supports reliable communication between the transmitters and the control room.

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