



Toast of the Town

We Celebrate This Year's Readers' Choice Award Winners

Joe Feeley, Editor in Chief

You can't go wrong when you have readers who are eager to report who they think are the companies they find the most helpful in solving their ever-changing automation needs.

That's the case again with this year's CONTROL DESIGN Readers' Choice Awards. We just put those choices in the hands of our performance-focused readers. They answered our call again and told us which automation suppliers provide the best instrumentation, controls, and automation technologies for their industrial machine builder community. They also made it clear which of those companies they think provide excellent service and support.

Our model for this award remained the same. Some months ago, we sent survey forms to more than 12,000 CONTROL DESIGN subscribers who tell us they have authority to specify, recommend, or purchase industrial automation and control products for their machines. Vendors are not eligible to vote, so we didn't knowingly let any supplier get a ballot. And,

for the few occasions when we found a vendor in the response mix, we purged the ballot with a sense of righteousness and delight. This is for our machine builder and system integrator readers and no one else.

Marketers call our approach an unaided survey. We never include a list of vendors or product brands to choose from. We listed 48 hardware and software categories and asked the participants to fill in the one best company for the products he or she had experience with. We received responses from 350 readers.

While they were choosing the best companies, we also asked the participants to rate the service and support they receive from these companies on a scale of 1 (bad) to 5 (excellent).

Our published results include only those companies that received at least a 5% share in their category.

Variety Is Growing

Similar to previous award results, we have an abundance of clear winners and plenty of closely contested races this year. But the results indicate a trend towards an expanded set of reader product and company preferences within categories (less single-company dominance), even though the total number of companies making the list dropped from 100 to 85.

Thirty of the 48 product categories listed returned margins of victory of 10% or greater vs. the second-best vote-getter (In 2002, 34 races returned this result). Ten of these 30 winners scored landslide wins with margins of victory greater than 25%, a clearly declining sub-set compared with 14 in 2002 and 16 in 2001.

The number of close races—with a margin of victory of 5% or less—increased to 13, compared with 10 the previous two years. Seven of the races were statistical dead heats, up slightly from five last year and six in 2001.

Six companies did themselves proud with multiple category wins. Demonstrating the same powerful reader affinity as in previous years, Rockwell Automation won or tied for first place in 16 hardware and three software categories. Other multiple winners included four each for Emerson Process Measurement and Parker Automation/Parker Hannifin. Highlighting the scope of its aggressive acquisition posture, Danaher Motion tied for first place in three separate categories, while Baldor Electric, GE Fanuc, Honeywell, and Pepperl+Fuchs all won twice.

Of the 55 winners (there were some category ties for first) listed last year, 43 defended their turf by winning or tying in the category again this year.

Those No-Contest Contests

The result in eight of the product categories produced winners that garnered 50% or more of the votes cast, a result similar to previous years.

Five of categories produced winners gaining more than 60% shares. Hoffman Engineering picked up 64% of the Enclosure vote, Pepperl+Fuchs, as a result of its purchase of BebecEPS, nailed down 64% of the Purging System responses, Rockwell Automation received a 63% share in both PLCs and PLC Programming Software, and Autodesk was the choice of 62% of the ECAD Software voters.

There were nine other categories where the winner didn't garner a majority, but still whipped its closest competitor by 25 percentage points or more.

GE Fanuc Automation's wins in CNC Software and CNC Hardware were by margins of 47 and 40 percentage points. Rockwell Automation's margin of victory in the Industrial Electric Drive category was 34 points; it won the Input/Output System category by 33 points; it was 29 points better than its nearest rival in Light Tower, and was a 28-point winner in Motion Control Software. Sola/Hevi-Duty powered its way to a 29-point win in Power Supply, Emerson Process Management measured in as a 28-point winner in the Pressure Measurement category, while Red Lion Controls took the Panel Meter category by a 25-point margin.

After Careful Tabulation, the Close Races

As stated above, we had 13 tightly contested races that offset the eight blow-outs.

We declared co-winners in seven of the 13. Phoenix Contact and Rockwell Automation tied for first in the Terminal Block category, both getting more than double the number of votes of any other company in the category. Tyco Electronics and

Thomas & Betts shared top spot for Industrial Electrical Connector, while Pepperl+Fuchs and MTL tied for the top in the Intrinsic Safety category. Both categories were highly contested, with six companies receiving at least a 5% share. Parker Hannifin/Daedal and Danaher Motion/Thomson shared the Linear Actuator category win, Parker/Compumotor and Danaher Motion split the Stepper Motor category, Danaher Motion and Rockwell Automation co-owned the Encoder/Resolver category, while Banner Engineering and Rockwell Automation shared the spotlight for Presence Sensing, the most competitive category with eight companies making the leader board.

In the six other very-close races, four were decided by just three percentage points. Rockwell Automation nipped Dell Computer in the Industrial Computer Category, Parker Hannifin got past Festo in the Pneumatic System Components category, Rockwell Automation edged Ametek/Drexelbrook in the Alarm/Annunciator category, and Emerson Process Management beat out Endress+Hauser in Level Measurement, the second-most-competitive category with seven companies receiving at least a 5% share.

Z-World bested Advantech by four percentage points in Single-Board Computer, while Action Instruments beat Phoenix Contact in Signal Conditioner by only five points.

Great Service Is Recognized, But It's Dropping

Eighty-five companies, 15% fewer than in 2002, received enough votes (5% or greater share) to appear in the published results.

Of those 85, you awarded 60 of them service and support scores of 4.0 or better—very good-to-excellent performance on a scale of 1-5. That number of companies is a significant 12% drop compared to the number recognized for their great service last year. The Service and Support table (pg 36) lists those companies that readers identified as providing service with ratings of 4.0.

Further, in 2002, nine companies received service and support scores of 4.5 or better. This year you awarded that recognition to just four companies. Is this a warning shot across the suppliers' bow?

Nonetheless, any company making this year's service and support list should be gratified to receive this reader vote of confidence. As was the case last year, some of the companies achieved these noteworthy service marks in multiple categories.

This was AutomationDirect's year for service recognition. It was the only company that received a service mark of 4.6 from the readers, and it earned the mark in three categories: Operator Interface Terminal, PLC, and Terminal Blocks.

Three companies were given 4.5 scores: Banner Engineering for Presence Sensing, Schneider Electric/Modicon for PLC Programming Software, and Siemens Energy & Automation for Industrial Network Components.

Twenty different companies received service scores of 4.0 or better in multiple categories.

Here is the complete listing of this year's elite group of high performers. We welcome your further analysis and comment about this year's outcome.



Red Lion's Panel Meters

PANEL METER

1.	Red Lion Controls	34%
2.*	Simpson Electric	9%
	Yokogawa	8%
	Newport	7%