Streamline Plant Project Processes

Streamlining the setup, creation, and review processes of plant projects can have a major effect on the efficiency of a manufacturer's operations. Through the design and release of a new plant design solution, 3-D software design firm Autodesk sought to foster better collaboration and interaction among the different components of a manufacturing enterprise.

Autodesk Plant Design Suite 2011, is the company's newest AutoCAD-based plant design solution, designed to allow for the sharing of common data structures and file formats to provide for smoother user experience and data structures. The product is designed to be a true concept-to-isometric solution that streamlines the setup, creation, and review of plant projects. Furthermore, it brings Autodesk's AutoCAD-based plant design tools together with Autodesk Navisworks in a single, integrated package to foster better collaboration and interaction.

Robert Shear, Director of Industry Solutions for Autodesk, recently sat down with Manufacturing Business Technology to discuss Autodesk Plant Design Suite 2011, technological trends, and collaboration as it relates to plant design applications.

Having all the plant design and project review capabilities all in one single, integrated package, what are the some of the advantages that brings to the user?

Having it under one license…just makes life a whole lot easier. We think it's really important to get (3-D walkthrough application) Navisworks on everyone's desk… It's

one thing to have it on one or two people's desk, but if everyone has it than that enables a much broader review cycle, enables much richer interaction between the folks that are designing that plant … It gets it on their desk in a very intuitive way that lets them navigate through it, review the design, review the new plant, and make sure it's up to regulatory codes.

The key is having it all together … having Navisworks on every desk really has the potential to improve how everyone collaborates … This just furthers along our goal of access and availability. Up until now, we've made 3-D design accessible and affordable. Now … we bring that 3-D review capability that Navisworks brings out into the broader plant community.

It seems that different facets of a manufacturing enterprise can collaborate well using this tool? Is the collaboration aspect something you really considered when putting this together?

We call it review and sharing, but I think collaboration might be a better word. You have people in different offices, you have people in different disciplines, they may see each other for lunch, but they don't really look into each other's specialized applications. One person might be doing something in electrical design, another person might be doing something in equipment, and by having Navisworks sort of unify that all together, it really does a lot of things for collaboration.

Do you think a lot of these new technological trends, some of the cutting edge tools, are becoming more mainstream?

As far as the economic times, what's interesting is, these days; our primary customers are engineering firms that do the design on these. They're having to do a lot more work up front to try to communicate the project details to their customers, having a lot more work up front to get the bid. And the best way to do that is to take it back to the universal 3D language, right? Put it into a model, show people what you're going to make, show them exactly how you're going to differentiate yourself. So we're seeing a lot of activity in the 3D area, even with the downturn. It's not very expensive technology, and I think it can help you differentiate your business, versus the competition …

It seems as if everyone is looking for some sort of competitive differentiator, or a way to do things more efficiently. Would it be fair to say this is one option that's out there?

If you look at the kinds of projects that are going on in plants … there's a lot of activity in retrofits, revamps, and reconfigurations. That second class … has gone through the roof as the economy has gone down. The companies that don't really have the funding for the new projects have the time to make the improvements to their plants, that they didn't have before because they were running at 110% capacity. There's a lot of activity in (that) area, and our solution brings in something affordable, something you can use on the spot for all your products, and you can justify the use for it on smaller projects.

For more information, and to download trial versions of AutoCAD Plant 3D, AutoCAD P&ID 2011, and Navisworks Manage, visit www.autodesk.com *[1].*

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