

Connectivity from controller to ERP system

The OPC Foundation is dedicated to the open communication of controller components. Compared to the previous communication with control systems, the new Unified Architecture extends communication to production planning and ERP systems. Joachim Kroll spoke to Reinhold Achatz, vice-president of the board of directors of the OPC Foundation.



Reinhold Achatz: "The integration of data is very important today."

What's the focus in this year's appearance of the OPC Foundation at the show?

■ **Achatz:** Our central theme is still UA, Unified Architecture. The idea is relatively young, and I think this new architecture will spread fast in 2006. Apart from that, the OPC Foundation is now ten years old. We've achieved a lot during this time, and in particular we managed to maintain a stable interface. After all, we're not in the consumer sector but in industry, where protection of your investment and long product life cycles are of central importance.

Where does the extra performance of Unified Architecture come from?

■ **Achatz:** Firstly from the fact that XML and Web services are non-proprietary. That doesn't mean we want to break away from Microsoft.

Its systems are very wide-spread in automation technology. But we're becoming more flexible. We can also communicate more simply with Linux/Unix systems or with controllers.

Another extra benefit is the further development of OPC. We started as an interface between controllers and control systems. We specified this interface on a neutral basis so that every controller can work with every control system. With XML and Web services as machine-to-machine communication, OPC becomes a service-oriented architecture. That enables the links to MES and ERP systems – a subject that's emerged in recent years. This integration of data is very important today.

Was there too much uncontrolled growth in OPC specifications, for example OPC-DA, OPC-AE, OPC-

HDA, that now needs to be normalized by UA?

■ **Achatz:** I wouldn't call it uncontrolled growth. We matched the specification to the needs of the users. That was a highly controlled process. We have a well coordinated, decentralized steering committee that managed these tasks very well. It's only natural that a specification which grows for all of ten years isn't as clear or concise as at the beginning.

Are XML and Web services already being implemented in new installations?

■ **Achatz:** Definitely not yet with Unified Architecture. That won't be the case until 2006. It's important that we should offer migration paths, because UA provides more functionality. But it's still a matter of preserving the implemented functionality.

Joachim Kroll, Elektronik