A typical project may be the design, procurement, construction and commissioning of a food production facility built as an extension to an existing site, which takes in fresh and processed raw materials to produce a short shelf life product for sale by all the major supermarkets in dedicated packaging. The project must be completed within a specified programme and budget on a site which is limited for access, is adjacent to a major supermarket, petrol station, holiday traffic route and residential estate. The project scope includes building a facility with a guaranteed output to produce new products and a product which is to be transferred from another part of the UK where the factory is being closed down and the workforce being made redundant. In this instance, delivering the technical scope of the project was relatively straightforward, but maintaining supplies from the existing plant to the supermarkets during construction, establishing and maintaining the “team”, location, neighbours and product transfer were the most challenging of the success criteria to achieve, requiring a variable operating paradigm depending on the circumstances. The “Bacon Sandwich” technique worked quite well.

The team from the site which was to be closed actually wanted the new facility to succeed. The plant was handed over for commissioning and at that point the food technologists stopped listening to anyone else. Water trials went well but team could not replicate the products. Taste panels were convened and organoleptic measurements were made to determine how the product differed from previous facility. Ultimately, the solution was very simple, the recipe control was well outside specification because someone had forgotten to correct the flow meter calibration for handling cream instead of water.

Most people know how a doctor, dentist, architect, teacher or plumber spend their day but to say that you are a measurement & control engineer or technician will result in some very blank looks. Equally for the younger generation it is not “cool” to be involved in science, technology and engineering. I hope I have shown that measurement & control has a diverse range of applications that at any given time are limited only by the technologies available and the imagination of its practitioners. These are likely to become more diverse as our lives become more sophisticated.

One thing is certain – Life as we know it would be far more difficult without us.

In May 2006 the Bureau International des Poids et Mesures (BIPM) produced the 8th edition of the brochure entitled The International System of Units. It is the essential reference for all those who wish to use SI units correctly. BIPM has also published a Concise Summary of the complete document. Although both of these documents are available and can be downloaded from the BIPM web site (www.bipm.org), the Concise Summary should be of considerable interest and use to members and we have sought permission to reproduce it here.

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