



A natural curiosity

With a 21-year career at Schneider Electric, Dale Wrangles has always been an engineer at heart. "I spent most of my young life taking things apart," he says. "Anything my family had that was electromechanical or electronic, I would take it apart. Most of the time I couldn't put it back together. I was trying to figure out what was inside all these things and what they did. I always had a natural curiosity about how things actually worked."

Hitting the targets

The Carbon Reduction Commitment may be concentrating minds on energy efficiency, but there is still some way to go. Paul Fanning talks to one of those who is trying to spread the message.

There are few people that would disagree about the need for industry to reduce its energy costs. Over and above the environmental question, rising fuel prices mean it makes sound business sense. And, looming over the market at the moment is the mandatory CRC Energy Efficiency Scheme, which aims to reduce the UK's carbon usage by 20% by 2020 (as compared to 1990 levels). Already in its reporting stage, this scheme is going to have a very significant impact on all levels of manufacturing, meaning as it does that any organisation that has used more than 6000 MWh of electricity in 2008 (roughly equating to £500,000 spend) will have to purchase and surrender allowances each year to cover their CO₂ emissions.

Despite all this pressure, however, Dale Wrangles, director of Industry at Schneider Electric UK, finds that the message is still not getting through. He says: "I think there's going to be a dash at the last minute to resolve a lot of problems. I suspect it's going to be a panic situation in many cases."

Many of Wrangle's views have been informed by Schneider Electric's recently commissioned 'Energy Management Report', which provides an insight into the likely future of energy management over the next 20 years. "You can get hooked up in what you think and not think about what the market actually wants. This report has produced findings to support what's actually really happening out there and ways to manage energy efficiency in the future," he says.

While larger corporate organisations in the UK understand their environmental impact and the need to be what he calls 'good corporate citizens', the same cannot necessarily be said of their smaller counterparts. He says: "For the smaller companies in the marketplace, it's a completely different discussion. They don't necessarily see it as their duty to be a good corporate citizen. It's all a distraction. They are quoted, in the report as being busy getting orders in the door. I don't need to make any investment, nor have personnel involved in that responsibility."

In many cases, he believes, this is due to a failure to persuade many of those within industry of the urgency to reduce carbon consumption and also of a general scepticism about government initiatives. "There is a job to be done explaining that this is an opportunity rather than just a burden," he says. "I don't think people are particularly swayed by legislation or government initiatives. Many feel that these initiatives are fads. So the buy-in from many companies is not immediately there."

One of the findings of the report was that, while the environmental case for energy reduction may not convince companies, the financial case will – and not just because of the costs that will be incurred by companies who fail to comply (although he concedes that 'it's always a great motivator when you get a huge bill from the Government because

of your carbon frailties'). He says: "Carbon reduction and the danger to the planet are not necessarily ideas that all companies buy into, but what they do buy into is the idea of saving money."

Given that Wrangles estimates the average savings possible by energy reduction measures at around 30% and the average payback time being less than two years, it would seem an obvious move. However, he feels that companies are being held back by the need to make capital expenditure and an innate scepticism of the technologies involved. He says: "I've lost count of the number of people who've said to us 'if you fit

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one variable speed drive on one of our machines and it does what you say, we'll buy it and fit them throughout the plant. After all, it's not as if VSDs are a new technology!"

Another factor, he believes, is that many companies have 'de-skilled' and no longer have the personnel competent to undertake the necessary measures. Here, he believes, is where companies such as Schneider Electric have a role to play. Says Wrangles: "We need to fill that void by offering consultancy services on installation, design and specification. For instance, we've an energy efficiency team."

This type of consultancy is an aspect of the business that Schneider Electric is currently growing. Wrangles notes: "That's where our growth is: in consultancy services. We need to be able to approach organisations with a solution rather than just a bag of products."

The issue of skills is one dear to Wrangles' heart, not least because it affects Schneider Electric in much the same way it does the rest of UK industry. "You get worried about the industry going forward when you see so few universities focusing on engineering. We have been recruiting on the motion and drives side and we're going to send them round the world for a year to learn the industrial applications of motion and drives. For a job like that, you'd expect to see a long list of job applications, wouldn't you? But unfortunately, that hasn't been the case."

Nonetheless, Wrangles sees the future as positive and sees Schneider Electric having a more and more integral role to play in his customers' businesses, particularly as it relates to energy saving. "Our job is to create demand, service our customers' needs and find new, innovative ways of doing things," he says.

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