

NEWS/BUSINESS



ESE marks 30 years, looks to continue excellence in customer service, employee satisfaction

By Alyssa Mitchell

MARSHFIELD, Wis. — As it celebrates its 30th anniversary in business, ESE Inc. is transitioning to new leadership to offer customers a complete solution for their plant automation system needs.

The Marshfield, Wisconsin-based company designs and develops plant automation systems for the food, dairy and beverage industries. ESE — which is a certified member of the Control System Integrators Association (CSIA) and a Rockwell Automation Solution Partner — has built a strong and diverse base of manufacturing customers from coast to coast over its 30 years.

As an ESOP (employee stock ownership plan) company since 2005, ESE has created a 100-percent employee-owned organization so that each team member can be an integral part of the company's milestones and successes, says Kevin Nowack, director of engineering, ESE.

Nowack notes ESE has built a group of experts that work closely together to offer customers a complete solution for automation, engineering and analytical instrumentation.

ESE has tapped Michael Richart as president and CEO to lead this team of experts. Throughout his career, Richart has helped companies succeed by optimizing the intersection of data, people, process and technology. Prior to his appointment as president and CEO, Richart was director of business operations at ESE.

Richart takes a holistic end-to-end business approach that invests highly in people, the talent that makes the difference to ESE customers.

"This is an exciting time for ESE," Richart says. "The food and beverage industry continues to grow and the needs are evolving. We're right there on top of it and are part of the evolution. Our commitment to 'customer care' means we are driven to provide the best possible experience for everyone who works with ESE."

Meanwhile, Tom Walther, who served as ESE's president since 2000 and CEO since 2012, is transitioning to chief innovation officer at the company. In this new role, Walther will lead strategic customer initiatives and build upon the customer-centric focus he has established among ESE staff for two decades.

"As Michael assumes responsibility for the day-to-day operations of ESE, I will be able to increase the amount of time I spend with our customers," Walther says. "We want their first call to be ESE, and I want to help them navigate an increasingly complex marketplace that features labor, product safety and so many other issues."

In the dairy sector, ESE offers several specialty services for plants producing milk, cheese, ice cream and other dairy products.

"We have sophisticated solutions to help you meet all your needs related to product standardization, pasteurization and filtration," Nowack says. He adds ESE

has used its knowledge and expertise to build solid partnerships with customers across all facets of the dairy sector.

In particular, ESE is a reliable source for batch process engineering, Nowack notes.

"We offer user-configurable and fixed sequencer-based systems and comprehensive batch reporting to help customers meet today's food safety regulations," he says.

Nowack adds ESE has vast experience in customizing dairy operations with highly scalable and intuitive recipe

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Michael Richart
ESE INC.

configuration capabilities; continuous multiple stream in-line blending systems; clean-in-place; mix and hold tank control; ingredient receiving to finished product (packaging); raw ingredient control; advanced system configurations; and data acquisition, historian and reporting.

The company also provides several fluid processes with HTST and UHT pasteurization systems and filtration methods including nanofiltration, ultrafiltration and reverse osmosis controls and automation.

Nowack notes that going beyond automation, one of the most versatile tools ESE offers dairy producers is its Q5 analyzer series with laboratory, at-line and in-line versions available. Using near infrared (NIR) testing, these state-of-the-art analyzers provide the fastest, most accurate multi-constituent testing, he says.

In addition to being an integrator, ESE is a consultant, Walther notes.

"We tackle risk management head on and successfully, building partnerships with our customers," he says. "Each step of the way ESE works with you, optimizing the process and maximizing your profits."

Tim Foster, president and founder of Concept Integration Inc., worked with ESE from 2002-2008 when he was co-founder of Specialty Protein Producers LLC, which specialized in the production of protein products from dairy and soy.

Specialty Protein Producers, which has since been sold, tapped ESE to do the design work for their Rockwell Automation control system.

"They were instrumental from the beginning," Foster says. "The thing that brought us to ESE is they are great innovators."

Foster notes in 2006 and 2007, there were not many control systems that were sophisticated enough to meet Specialty Protein Producers' needs. Rather than

one control room in the plant, the company wanted a hand-held control unit that operators could have with them on the plant floor to take samples of product, listen to pumps and catch problems early on.

"ESE helped us develop that, and they worked with us on every step," he says.

Foster believes when choosing a provider for an automation or control system, choosing a company that communicates well is critical.

"The people at ESE were so intuitive," he says. "When you tell them your concept, they know right away what you need."

He adds that thoroughness and attention to detail are two other key qualifications met by ESE, as well as fair prices and a quick turnaround.

"They're the whole package," he says.

Foster notes that Concept Integration is working on a project within the next year that will involve ESE's expertise.

"When a company can do everything they can do, you want to keep them around," he says.

Looking ahead, Richart notes that with more food safety regulations coming down the pipeline, ESE wants to be at the forefront, helping its dairy custom-

ers to be proactive and plan ahead with expert consultation and providing the best solutions.

Walther notes the employee ownership and collaborative culture at ESE foster an environment where "people want to work here, want to be here, and that's a great place to be." ESE is a stable, growing company whose committed employee-owners contribute their ideas and skills to influence and share in the success of the company and its customers, he adds, noting the environment allows the company to attract top talent.

"You can have that without being an ESOP, but you can't have an ESOP without that," he says. "Being a part of an organization that works collectively together and collectively enjoys success — that's a tradition we are looking to continue for the next 10, 20, 30 years."

Walther adds that a key focus is to learn what each customer's business strategy is and help them to develop a strategic roadmap to meet their goals.

"It's about where they want to go, and determining how best to get there," he says. "We want to sit down with customers and help them understand that our services and expertise can help them develop where they want to go." CMN



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