

Festo South Africa: engineering tools for success and the launch of Cabinet Guide Online



Adrian Bromfield, who has been with Festo South Africa for 19 years, succeeded former national sales manager, Warren Harvard, when he transferred to Festo UK in December 2016. In this article, Bromfield, who brings a wealth of knowledge and experience with him, talks about the Festo's modern drive to enhance the competitive edge for customers and the launch of the new Cabinet Guide Online tool.

Ease of access

Over the past few years, we have transformed our business model to allow for more convenient access to the Festo product range throughout Africa. We've significantly increased our distribution channels to market. We've signed up large distributors such as RS Components, the Bearing Man Group (BMG) and Hyflo. This means that we have over substantially increased our distribution footprint throughout the continent.

We still have a strong and loyal network of representative distributors who are able to support more intensive technical queries on projects. Further to that, we have an additional 70 resellers nationally who stock our products. We ensure that all our distributors are trained so that they maintain a standard of technical support and product knowledge.

Our Online Shop serves as a popular and convenient option for customers to purchase our products.

Last but not least, we still have direct channels to market through our Sales Engineers, Contact Centre and our Outbound Sales division.

Innovative and expansive product portfolio for multiple industries

Whilst Festo has been traditionally known for its competence in Pneumatic automation, we are well equipped to assist customers in other segments such as electric automation and process automation. We aim to provide our customers with the automation solutions that best suit their needs.

We offer over 33 000 products that cater for a plethora of industrial sectors such as water technology, automotive, food and beverage, chemical, mining and energy to name a few.

From a cost perspective, we have invested heavily in the more-economical Festo core product range. This range consists of some 2 200 products that cover 80% of common automation applications. Through higher global unit volumes and our own implementation of Industry 4.0 in our Scharnhausen Technology Plant, we have not only been able to cut unit costs, but the range offers excellent price/performance ratios.

Innovation is essential to gain market share. The company's approach is innovative research and development, not only to develop new automation solutions, but also to inspire people to adopt modern technology. "We have successfully completed numerous bio-mimicry projects such as our Handling Assistant that simulates an elephant's trunk and our bionic-ant robots that cooperate with each other to move items.

With these futuristic innovations, Festo strives to inspire people all over the world towards smart and intuitive automation solutions.

On the product development side, Festo's new Industry 4.0-ready Smart Motion Terminal is a revolutionary new valve that incorporates completely new thinking. This is the world's first digital pneumatic valve to be controlled by apps. It can be programmed to perform functions that currently require customers to order and install more than 50 separate products or positions.

Combining the advantages of electric and pneumatic technologies, the Smart Motion

Terminal will offer automation adopters the highest possible level of standardisation, reduced complexity, rapid time-to-market, reduced installation costs and increased energy efficiency. The Smart Motion Terminal product release date for the local market is scheduled for 2018.

We don't just sell products – we sell solutions

Festo offers a range of value-added services such as customised product configurations, consulting and training services. Our Customer Solutions division can manufacture and repair a variety of components and turn-key systems locally.

We partner with our clients and use a consultative approach for services such as project conceptualisation, design, energy saving and air quality testing services that save clients both time and money. We've gone a step further for conceptualisation projects and we can provide highly accurate test data for a client's handling system prior to the deployment of the project using our Application centre.

One of our most important solutions offering is our Didactic division. Industrial automation is a complex field. It's not good enough to sell the product without provisioning for proper training on how to utilise it. We realise that investment in training and coaching are smart investments in sustainability, knowledge, skills, loyalty, and retention of staff.

Festo Didactic offers a full suite of training courses, learning systems and consultancy services. The consulting division offers customised planning, designing, and equipping of complete workshops and laboratories (in science, technology and education). Most tertiary technical colleges are equipped with our systems, which demonstrates our commitment to empowering young people in the automation field.

We train tomorrow's technology today and this has never been more appropriate than it is now with emergence of Industry 4.0. The reality, particularly in South Africa, is that customers aren't necessarily familiar with new automation technology and we see our role as bringing that awareness and technical understanding to as many users as possible.

To further validate our commitment to facilitation and preparing the industry for this industrial evolution, we have invested in a multi-million rand Cyber-Physical (CP) system, which will form part of our Industry 4.0 training courses. The CP System is in South Africa and is being introduced to our clients nationally ahead of the I4.0 Course launch in 2018.



Above: The HGO (Handling Guide Online) allows the user to configure a system very quickly and then download CAD drawings.

Right: Festo's new CGO (Cabinet Guide Online) offers control cabinet solutions for water technology or handling systems.

Engineering tools for success

While advancing technology at the highest level, Festo's business model is currently striving to make industrial automation as easy to implement and convenient to access.

We have an extensive range of tools easily available via Festo's website, many of which are free. Festo also offers several engineering tools, including: Tubing Selector; Component Selector; a 3D Product Configurator; and Fluid Draw – which enables pneumatic and electrical circuit diagrams to be drawn and downloaded for use in engineering processes.

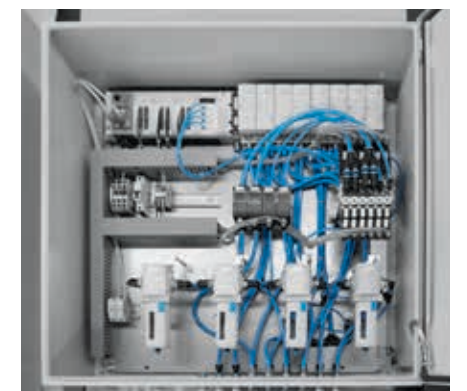
"These support structures are ideally suited to new-generation engineers, who are used to having 24/7 access to the information they need.

Another useful engineering tool is the HGO (Handling Guide Online). This is a design tool for gantry based mechanical automation systems. It allows the user to configure a system very quickly and then download CAD drawings that can be directly incorporated into all commonly used engineering design software packages.

Ideal for pick-and-place, inline filling or packaging systems, these guides have some 800 pre-assembled models that can be accessed as starting points for customised solutions.

The launch of the Cabinet Guide Online

The newest addition to Festo's portfolio of engineering tools is the Cabinet Guide Online (CGO). The CGO complements the HGO (Handling Guide Online) in that it offers Control Cabinet solutions for handling

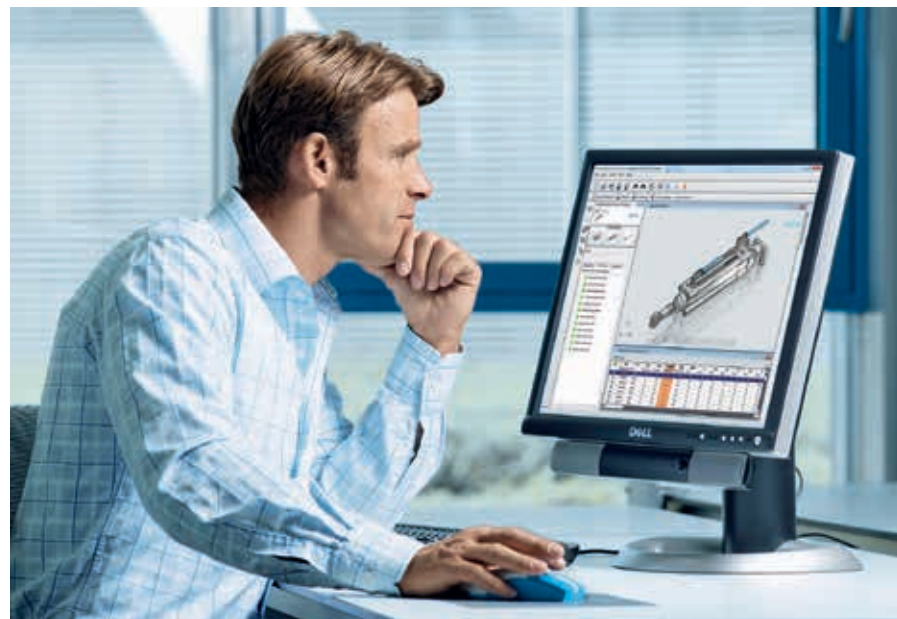


systems. This Cabinet configuration tool covers the necessary considerations, with a few simple prompts, namely: I/O requirements, communication protocols, interface requirements (HMI), and electrical power connections needed as well as valve terminal requirements.

Some of the benefits of this tool are that it is:

- **Fast:** The right Cabinet for your water technology or handling system in 10 minutes.
- **Efficient:** The CGO cuts your engineering time and effort to a minimum.
- **Intuitive:** The CGO is very easy to use and features structured prompts for data input.
- **Reliable:** Direct enquiry to the Customer solutions department.
- **Ready-to-install:** Fully assembled and tested systems mean reduced time and effort for logistics, installation and commissioning.
- **Flexible:** A variety of options offer flexibility for your solution.

By taking an integrated solutions approach to implementing and operating automation systems, Festo is helping to raise South Africa's productivity and global competitiveness. All these 'productivity tools' help us and our customers to remain at the forefront of industrial automation. □



Festo offers several engineering tools that enable pneumatic and electrical circuit diagrams to be selected and drawn via online services and downloaded for use in engineering processes.