

The Probe Switch is On at Rockwell Automation.

Test engineers Jim Rondeau, Test Engineering Manager and Dave DeSimone, Project Test Engineer, lead Rockwell Automation's test operation in Milwaukee. The Milwaukee facility, one of five Rockwell Automation locations in North America, is a research facility utilizing the Agilent 3070 platform for test development.

Rockwell Automation in Milwaukee, WI had specified the same brand spring contact probes for several years until 1998 when they made the decision to switch to IDI. Why would this high mix, low volume manufacturer consider a change when their fixtures could go two years before changing probes?



Jim Rondeau, Test Engineering Manager and Dave DeSimone, Project Test Engineer

The culprit: contaminated probes

The reason became clear during a period between 1997-1998. "We started getting some bad shipments from our probe manufacturer," said Dave. "Contamination, rusted springs...we had a problem."

Rockwell Automation's test lab discovered that the probes were contaminated with chlorine. "To make matters even worse," according to Dave, "the manufacturer wasn't very helpful in solving our problem."

That's when Rockwell Automation started to take a hard look at IDI. "Rockwell Automation was impressed with the side by side evaluations documenting the longer cycle life and higher first pass yields of our new ICT probe technology," said Ricardo Villarreal, of Max Sales, IDI's Sales

Representative. Anne Bush, IDI Board Test Product Manager and Bill Oxley, IDI Sr. Director of Sales – Board Test Products, came to Rockwell Automation, too. "Our plant personnel wanted to make a personal visit so they could listen and understand Rockwell's requirements," added Ricardo.

Comparison trials convincing

But the test engineers at Rockwell Automation in Milwaukee, WI wanted to see IDI performance for themselves. They set up a side-by-side comparison between IDI and their current brand. "We set up probes for an automation line," said Dave.

"One-half IDI's Titanium Pro ICT and the other half with our current brand."

The trial was stopped after 15,000 cycles. "We were just hoping that the IDI probes would perform at least as well if not better," added Dave. "The IDI tips were holding up much better. That gave us a huge boost in confidence to make the switch."

The comparison convinced Rockwell Automation that a probe is not a probe. The Titanium Pro ICT had revolutionized probe design and they were impressed. "Our probes had always been biased in one direction," said Dave. "ICT uses bifurcation to keep the barrel in the middle. It consistently hits its targets."

The point was customization

What sealed the deal for Jim and Dave was the way IDI responded to a specialized need Rockwell required in their highly contaminated test environment. "We expressed to IDI that we needed special head styles," said Jim. "They agreed to design a head-ed blade and headless blade to our specifications. We were not used to a probe manufacture stepping up to the plate like this."

The conversion to IDI probes went smoothly

"They had the probes that went right into the existing receptacles," said Jim. "We just changed our spec to IDI."

Fixture houses were informed that IDI was now the probe of choice. "We let them know how IDI was clearly superior and how important it was for us to make the change," said Dave. "We made it clear that that this was an important business decision for us."

Rockwell Automation continues to be impressed with IDI performance. "We recently took one fixture in at 22,000 actuations," said Dave. "The ICT probes were still hitting dead center. We were amazed."

Focal Probes hit the mark

Like a lot of test engineers, Dave and Jim wanted to use larger, more robust probes on closer centers. The option from their former probe supplier made manufacturing and replacement difficult. IDI's Focal Probe made using larger probes on closer centers almost effortless. "Focal Probe was vastly superior to what we were using" said Dave. "The key is the weight of the probe rests on lower G-10 plate."

Why should a test manager consider a switch to IDI?

According to Dave, it's IDI's customer service, superior quality and lots of options. "Ricardo and Anne have been great," he added. "They help us by bringing us useful information. Ricardo shows up and listens to us. He doesn't just drop something off, like the last guy."

Dave added: "With the advanced performance of IDI's bifurcated probe design, comparable pricing and the willingness to design the exact head styles we needed, the decision to switch became a no-brainer."

 **For more information on the Titanium Pro ICT Series** go to: www.idinet.com/ict

For more information on Rockwell Automation go to: www.ab.com/ratest