

Company history

1.0 Executive Summary

Fairfield Control Systems is a highly innovative Systems Integrator. The main core of the business is developing unique electrical control and instrumentation solutions to suit modern day industrial requirements. Fairfield's contracts are many and varied and at the very core of the business is innovation.

The expertise and adaptability of Fairfield was particularly well acknowledged in the lead up to the new millennium, when they successfully secured contracts for some of the UK's most prestigious and innovative millennium contracts, including the British Airways London Eye, The Gateshead Millennium Bridge (the blinking eye), The Falkirk Millennium Wheel Boat Lift and The restoration of the Anderton Boat Lift.

Due to the fast moving environment in which Fairfield operates the ability to be able innovate is critical for the success of the company and to keep them at the leading edge of their industry. Fairfield commitment to innovation has been acknowledged by the Department of Trade and Industry with a Regional Enterprise Grant and two Smart Awards for Innovation in new product development.

2.0 Business History

Stephen Fowles, an engineering graduate from Sheffield Hallam University set up Fairfield in 1987 to fulfil industries need for quality system design and manufacture. As the Managing Director of the company, Stephen has seen the company go from strength to strength in all areas of corporate activity.

As the company became more established in the market place, the workload increased and the company had to take on more staff to fulfil work obligations. This resulted in the company having to make a strategic decision in 1994 to move from their original business premises in Alfreton, Derbyshire in order to expand the business.

The company moved to rented office space in an industrial unit in Bolsover, Derbyshire. This location sufficed for just over a year but the company was still expanding and so had to look again for new offices. In 1998 the company re-located to offices in Kirton, Nottinghamshire. This was a move away from the traditional units on industrial estates to a site consisting of an old rectory and a derelict village hall. Work started on the site to make yet more office space for further expansion, and the company was commended for creating local employment. Fairfield now employs twenty-five full time members of staff.

The success of the company has to be attributable to a combination of reasons; the main reasons include Fairfield commitment to its customers, the ability of the company to innovate and adapt in a changing market place and to changing technology, and the commitment that Fairfield has to its staff.

3.0 Company Background

Fairfield Control Systems Limited Mission Statement: 'Helping to improve our clients business performance through the design, supply and support of innovative

measurement, control, automation and information systems whilst giving our staff the opportunity to achieve their full potential.'

Fairfield's experience lies in industrial computer applications, distributed control systems, programmable controller systems and conventional instrumentation processes. The expertise in the above allows Fairfield to provide a comprehensive service to all major market sectors

The first contract that Fairfield secured was to design control systems for the tunnelling machines used to bore the Channel Tunnel. Since then, Fairfield has secured many prestigious contracts and has done work for many blue chip companies and public sector organisations. . Industry sectors served include metals production (Corus, Avesta Polarit), pharmaceutical and chemical (Boots, Pfizer), utilities (Dalkia, Scottish Power) civil and water (Anglian Water, Severn Trent) and bridge control (British Waterways, National Rivers, Environment Agency, Corporation of London).

Recently completed, and current projects include the control systems' for Tower Bridge, London, The Anderton Boat Lift, Northwich and The Falkirk Millennium Wheel Boat Lift which is due to be opened by the Queen in May 2002. The Gateshead Millennium Bridge also due to be opened by the Queen in May 2002.

Due to the very varied nature of the work, Fairfields staff must be highly flexible and committed to providing the best possible service. In Fairfields line of work, often many of the contracts are unique and are the first of their kind. This means that there is often no historic data to use and so development of a control system has to start from scratch, an example of this is the Gateshead Millennium Bridge or 'Blinking Eye' as it is also called. The tilting bridge is totally unique and so no other previous bridge control data was relevant. In this kind of environment the need for idea generation and innovation is crucial.

Fairfield place a large emphasis on customer care and after sales support and so offer a completely bespoke maintenance support service. The service support contracts are a partnership between the customer and Fairfield, each one tailor made to suit the specific requirements of the customer.

Due to the highly skilled work done by Fairfield, the company occupies a niche market with only a few direct competitors, these include Servelec and Salem Automation and Process Control. Fairfield competitive advantage lies in the bespoke and independent approach they have to selecting the most suitable equipment for each application.

4.0 New Product Development

Due to the very nature of Fairfield business, change and the ability to deal with it are part and parcel of the company's culture. The company is not adverse to taking risks and this is well demonstrated by their ability to combine their project based work with new product development.

In April 1999 Fairfield developed a product called 'VoiceCall' in response to identifying a gap in the market. VoiceCall allows information to be sent via spoken or written messages to a specified contact directly from the control room or remote site,

this has the advantage of freeing up resources as staff no longer have to be on site. VoiceCall is installed as part of a flood abatement system at Northwich, Cheshire for British Waterways. A Regional Enterprise Grant aided the development of this product.

In 2000 Fairfield again identified a gap in the market, this time in the agricultural sector (a sector not yet served by Fairfield). Research has shown that the application of water in the right quantity at the right time has huge benefits to the quality of crops. This combined with the introduction of more stringent quality control criteria, and the emphasis on the efficient use of resources meant a product was needed to aid growers with irrigation decision-making and efficient water application.

The product known as 'Precision Irrigation Control' (PIC) was developed for this purpose. Commended as being an innovative new product it won two Smart awards for innovation, the first for a feasibility study and the second for the production of a prototype.

As well as the Smart Awards, Fairfield were also accepted to take part in a Teaching Company Scheme (TCS) in conjunction with the Nottingham Trent University for the purpose of making PIC a commercial success and to create knowledge transfer between the University and Fairfield. Although Fairfield knew that PIC had huge commercial scope, the company lacked the marketing expertise needed to get the most out of this business opportunity.

The scheme is now half way through and market research has confirmed a strong market for the PIC product. At every stage PIC has been developed in close conjunction with the target market, emphasising Fairfield commitment to the customer. Since the initial ideas for PIC, the market for such a product has grown even more stable due to strong market influences regarding crop quality and resource management. PIC is due to be launched for the 2003 growing season.

Because of the innovative concept behind the PIC product, Fairfield has become involved in a Department of the Environment, Fisheries and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) Link project. The aim of the project is to improve vegetable quality by the more efficient use of water and nutrients. The project consortium consists of major players in the agricultural/ horticultural industry, combining some of the best expertise in this area. The outcome of this project could result in large benefits for both vegetable growers and consumers alike with extended shelf life and a reduction in waste.

Fairfield has also developed and manufactured its own range of automation products that forms a sideline to the mainstream business. Again this range of products was developed after a gap was identified in the market.

5.0 Our Attitude to Innovation and its Management

At Fairfield innovation is seen as much more than just a business activity but as a philosophy at the core of the business. The very nature of the business means that Fairfield is dependent on new ideas and innovation to drive the company forward and to make sure it stays at the leading edge of electrical control technology. Fairfield constantly has to innovate to come up with new solutions to satisfy ever-changing

technologies and system applications. To remain static in such an industry would result in certain failure.

The non-hierarchical organisational structure at Fairfield is conducive to the free flow of ideas within the company. Ideas from the bottom up are considered as valid as those generated from the top of the organisation. Regular brainstorming sessions are conducted where ideas can be generated and discussed in a fairly informal environment. Employees are always encouraged to contribute their thoughts and ideas in all aspects of the business.

For staff to feel at ease in this open-minded environment and to achieve the best from its employees, Fairfield makes sure that it invests in the personal development of its staff. Every encouragement is given for staff to achieve their full potential and the emphasis is put on personal development. In December 2001 the whole company took time out of the business to take part in a team building exercise, this proved to be an invaluable experience, which generated many new trains of thought.

The staff at Fairfield are the companies most valued resource. Many engineering graduates are offered jobs with Fairfield after completing their placement year with the company, also day release is supported for those employees who wish to gain further qualifications.

Fairfield demonstrate its commitment to innovation by the very nature of the business in which they operate. Innovation is the means by which the company can compete and remain at the leading edge of industry.

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