IBC European SCADA Conference
11th & 12th February – London

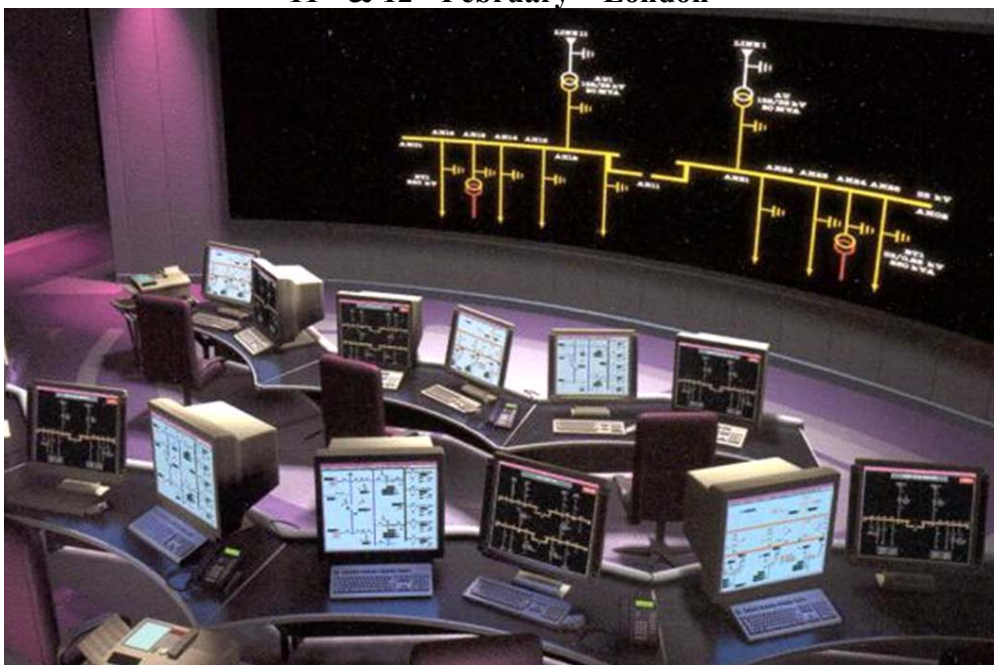

Figure 1 SCADA control room (courtesy Invensys)

Introduction

From our other E&P specific reporting – especially the Society of Petroleum Engineers – we realized that SCADA – the remote monitoring and control of production and other assets – is growing in importance with the emergence of the E-Field concept. The linkage from upstream oilfield models to the 'plumbing' of valves, meters and controllers is clearly a hot topic. The IBC EU SCADA conference disappointed a little in that the oil and gas production community was poorly represented. Nonetheless, we learned of very similar issues and developments from SCADA-focused reports from the gas transmission, water and waste management sectors. The commonality between these different industries is clear – everyone wants to 'drive' assets harder, to assure safe, auditable operations and sees web access to data from multiple sources and disciplines as a great leap forward from the isolated distributed control mechanisms of the past. Data mining is a growth area – with case histories of locating faults from analysis of historical SCADA data. The coupling of SCADA data with ERP (financial) data also introduces new ways of managing assets – along with new problems – see below.

This is our first visit to and report from the SCADA arena. So if you are a SCADA expert, please excuse any technical naiveté on our part – we may have failed to capture some of the niceties of SCADA, DCS, DSA etc. although to help ourselves through the acronym soup we supply a glossary below. We were therefore particularly grateful to Alan Lawless of Parsons Brinkerhoff who kindly supplied us with his impressions from the EU SCADA conference and gave a brief 'state of the industry' overview as follows -

> *There is an interesting demographic shift from previous SCADA conferences in that a majority of attendees used to hail from the electrical engineering community. At the IBC EU SCADA conference, a show of hands revealed that half of those present were from IT. As the industry moves from silo-like systems with relatively little interconnection, to ubiquitously connected, web based data availability, the emerging*

problem is one of data ownership. Today or in the near future it will be potentially possible for accountants to access flow data from a production asset. But what will such data mean? There is a danger that 'data' will be considered as 'gospel truth' and used inappropriately. The solution comes from new messaging systems which allow for data to be tagged with information about ownership and quality. In old SCADA and DCS systems data was sent as groups of binary bits whose meaning was only known to proprietary software and systems. Now information is tagged - using a variety of more or less proprietary formats (as yet there is no leading tag format although the OLE for Process Control (OPC) Foundation is making a claim for such). Note that these tags are not XML. All this is coming to a head as affordable primary level devices get smarter and cheaper. The industry has to an extent been 'caught on the hop' and is in a sense waiting for the next step beyond FieldBus (although this is still significant).

Contents

