Evaluation of software
Buying /licensing software development environment programming systems explained

Introduction

If you are in the buying process of an IEC 61131-3 development environment, there are nowadays a large number of (independent software) suppliers to choose from. To make your selection process easier, the following topics can help you in the evaluation. They are not so much technical details, but additional topics which should be evaluated.

First: there is no best overall product. A product should meet your needs, which means that you have to evaluate it. Below are some guidelines to do that.

Even if there is a best product nowadays, it can be surpassed with a new release of a competitor. Also, the actual status of the software product itself can be of minor importance: a next version is probably around the corner.

Points of attention

- Adaptation costs: how much do they ask to adopt the package to your hardware? How much to include your additional hardware and /or software libraries?

- The initial costs are different. In most cases the software environment needs adaptations. These can range over a broad area:
    o the name of the product as appears on the screen;
    o the adaptation to your specific hardware environment;
    o the adaptation of the user manuals to you needs;
    o the creation of user manuals under your own name;
    o the inclusion of additional requirements, like linking to your specific compiler.

- Licensing: besides the initial adaptation costs, licensing can be applicable. How much do they charge? How much for a one time buy-out? Do the royalties include future updates?

- Strategy to deal with minor and mayor updates.

- The quality of the software and training manuals, and there availability in the required languages.

- Is the product itself, including the on-line help functions, available in the required languages?

- Support: they all claim it, but who provides it best, and in your language? And at which costs? What is their strategy with respect to dealing with errors, minor and major?

- Training: can they provide on-site training for your people? Can they help your users? What do their training manuals look like? In which language are they? Can you use their material as basis for your own training?

- Update: how do they deal with updates? How do you deal with updates?

- Does the system provide on-line help? In which languages? Does that cover your needs?

- Is the company financially stable?

- Which references / installations does the company have? Do they include your competitors? Does that help you? Can you contact some of their references?

- How well can the company cope with your future architectures? Do they support distributed systems, if needed?

- If you have existing code which you want to include, can they support you? Does the environment support it? How well does it match? How much effort is estimated by them and by you to do the job? Are they willing to do it (at fixed costs), showing confidence and giving you a guarantee? At which costs? Which time frame?

- Can they provide an evaluation package?

- How fast are they in their response?

- Do they speak your language, not only your home language, but also do they know your environment?

- Is the product certified by PLCopen? At which level? For which language? How many updates

after their certificate? Can they show (a copy of) the certificate?

- Can they provide a compliance statement by sending the IEC 61131-3 feature tables showing clearly what they support?

- What are your main (expected) programming languages for this environment? How long are these languages supported? Which release are they on?

Remember: you don't want to be the guinea pig: testing takes time and costs money.

A good way to get started

1. Describe your (initial) requirements clearly on paper, including quotation procedure and deadline.
2. Send to all potential suppliers, a minimum of 5, preferably on the same day.
3. Note when the quotations get in, giving you a first impression of response speed.
4. Compare the overall quality of the offer.
5. Compare the fulfilment of your requirements.
6. Check the differences.
7. Talk to at least 3 companies.

If you have any additions / suggestions, please let us know.

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