

What is under the hood of your automation system?

Four things you should understand about alarm monitoring software

What makes up the engine of an alarm automation system?

Why should you care? Your automation system is a complex piece of software that runs your monitoring business, yet, it has some caveats other software manufacturers don't have to address. For example, it must run 24/7. You can shut down your accounting system for a few hours on a Sunday afternoon, but not your monitoring.

Changing monitoring systems is an involved process, so making the right decision is important. Ensuring the product has the functionality you need is a given, but you need to do more. You need to look under the hood to see what makes up the engine.



1. WHICH PROGRAMMING LANGUAGE IS USED?

The programming language is important because it determines if your investment is future-proof or not. If the language is not popularly supported, then it could:

- Have many flaws
- Be hard to write in, therefore, not productive
- Be hard to produce quality products
- Be hard to recruit experienced programmers

Most companies use a variety of tools and this is normal. The questions you should ask your provider focus on the core of the application: “In what language is the signal processing written?” or “In what language are the main user interfaces written?”

If you receive any of the following responses, you should be concerned:

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- **Delphi:** It was developed by Borland in 1995 and purchased by Embarcadero in 2009. The Technical Career recruiting company Dice.com listed Delphi as destined for death.
 - **Thoroughbred:** This is a fourth-generation programming language (4GL) developed by a 1980's. 4GLs became popular in the 1990's, but were never intended for large projects. The advent of the internet killed most of them. This is also a proprietary system and has limitations.
 - **Powerbuilder:** Another 4GL product developed in 1991. Now owned by SAP, it has been kept up to date, but its main criticism is that it is always following, never leading.
 - **Visual Basic:** Developed by Microsoft in 1991, recently declared legacy, and was replaced by .Net products. This language was used by Bold to develop its original Manitou User Interface, but has been replaced by the browser-based ManitouNEO, written in HTML5.

2. WHICH DATABASE IS USED?

The database is the heart of your system. It keeps your data backed up, replicated, and its integrity intact. The database type is dependent on the operating system. All automation providers, except one, use Windows as the server environment for a reason. Microsoft SQL Server leads the enterprise database market due to its commitment to innovation. Avoid providers who don't support MS SQL, and avoid the product Sybase ASE (now SAP). Bold moved away from this product in 2005 because of MS SQL's superiority and modernization. The last major release of SAP was in 2014.

3. IS MULTI-PROCESSING SUPPORTED?

Multi-processing is the ability for your application to do more than one thing at a time, such as, processing more than one signal at once, or handling more than one request from an operator. It's like having four security lines open at the airport versus one. Applications must already do that, right? Computers do things quickly so you may not notice. Just like the airport, one line is fine until it gets busy, then things start to slow down. You may not notice this problem until your business starts to grow.

Also, you may not be making the most use of your server. Typically, a server has four or more cores. An application that does not support multi-processing will only use one core. That's like having four security stations at the airport but everyone uses just one line. You are paying for equipment that is not getting used.



4. ARE 64-BIT APPLICATIONS SUPPORTED?

Most computers on the market today are 64-bit, because they run faster and process more information. Check to see if your automation provider can provide 64-bit software to match. This means as your company grows, the software grows too. If you run a 32-bit application on your Windows Server with 64GB of memory, it can use a maximum of 2GB and the rest is unused.

UNDER THE HOOD OF ManitouNEO

In 2000, Bold had the choice to continue with its Theos based legacy product or re-write. Bold started from scratch, built the Manitou product line on a foundation of operating system and database independence, and wrote the software in C++. The language core has expanded since to include C#, HTML5, and Java Script.

Bold Technologies recently released ManitouNEO, which features a browser-based user interface (UI) and supports 64-bit applications. Browser-based UIs are flexible, easier to integrate with other products, and less disruptive to deploy. Bold was able to drop in a new UI because of the solid foundation on which the software was designed.

There is an industry-wide shift for traditional, on-premises software to move to the Cloud. Be aware, older products can be offered “in the Cloud” with an updated user interface; however, the demands of modern software are way beyond what many of these older technologies were originally designed to handle. The programming languages used are outdated, they may not be supported long-term, they don't allow an automation provider to react to a changing industry, and they are not scalable—a crucial component of cloud computing.

Looking under the hood of your automation system, and knowing the answers to these questions, will help you maintain a healthy business.



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