

The human face of networking

Thanks to developments in internet networking technology, users of certain near infrared analytical instruments can now choose to have them managed by experts located at a central control centre. But who are these experts and wouldn't it be better to stick to traditional support with a friendly face calling in from time to time? Bob Schumann, Manager of the FOSS North America customer support centre provides some insights for In Focus (IF).



IF: What is the typical profile of someone doing support via the Remote Internet Analysis (RINA) network?

Schumann: At FOSS North America, there is no 'typical' profile. We tell our customers that they get the 'experts of the experts'. We have a group of customer service engineers who do the daily monitoring of the instrument performance and follow up if problems are seen. We have someone from our chemometrics group who handles all calibration updates, monitoring and validation issues. And I handle all setup, network, reporting and general troubleshooting. The users get direct access to the person most qualified to help them.

IF: What is the geographic spread of customers you are supporting via RINA?

We support North America and Canada, so our customers are mostly limited to this region, but RINA installations are spread all over the globe.

IF: Do you still talk to customers or is it now just a case of monitoring instruments?

RINA allows us to do much of the work monitoring and supporting instruments without contacting the customer at all. This makes the process much more efficient and we do not disturb their work routines. When a problem is noted, or we need to discuss a validation strategy for example, we call the customer. In North America, one of our customer service en-

gineers noted a particular noise pattern in the performance test of one of our customers. The pattern indicated that a specific component was wearing. He contacted them and was able to arrange for a service call before the instrument failed.

IF: Has RINA changed customer relations and if so, how?

RINA has allowed us to support customers in a more comprehensive and direct way with less interference to their operation than ever before. Whether it is looking at diagnostics, getting calibration update samples or updating models, we are able to do these operations without any assistance from the customer. This makes the process extremely efficient and allows us to be a true partner to our customer's analytical effort. Instrument validation, for example, is very easy for our customers with RINA. They simply need to add the validation data to the system and send us an e-mail. Our chemometrics expert evaluates the data, determines if a bias or possibly a calibration expansion is necessary, makes the changes on the network and sends the customer an e-mail. The validated products are automatically configured on their system.

RINA has enabled us to be pro-active in our customer support, and extremely fast in reactive mode when necessary.

IF: What is the most satisfying thing about working with network support?

It is very gratifying to work with a cus-

tommer completely new to NIR, and to be able to setup, monitor and work with them interactively as they learn and become familiar with the technology. Many of our customers today do not have a dedicated NIR person. The person running the instrument has ten other jobs to do. I view RINA Assist as us being the NIR expert on their team in the background, making sure everything is working properly.

I recall one case where a company had several NIR instruments located in remote parts of the world. All were setup differently and producing different numbers, with obvious frustration for the head office.

RINA was suggested as a solution and, one by one, each instrument was placed on the network. RINA was now enforcing a consistent configuration from the company's central office. And once the instruments were on RINA, we were able to determine the instrument health, standardisation and so on and fix the problems quickly. In less than two months, all their instruments were configured properly, locked down at the local instrument sites, passing all diagnostics and putting out correct, validated numbers. It was an incredible transformation of instruments thousands of kilometres apart. The customer now has a complete NIR network producing numbers that they could trust.

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