



The Automation Industry in Review - BBBB (Buy)

Automation Unplugged by Jim Pinto

Reviewed by Nick Sands

There are few people with the industry experience, the inside connections, and the knowledge of automation technology like Jim Pinto. His years as founder and CEO of Action Instruments, on top of other industry experience, and his network of contacts in many automation, integration, and end-user companies give Pinto insight into the past, present and future of automation, but it is his tell-it-like-is style and his gift for words that make *Automation Unplugged: Pinto's Perspectives, Pointers, and Prognostications* such an interesting read. If you work in the automation industry, you should read Pinto. You don't have to believe it all, but you should read it.

First Pinto reviews the recent history and financial status of the major automation companies. Pinto critiques the acquisitions and divestitures as well as the cooperate leaders themselves, pulling no punches. Then he boldly predicts the future, including who will be the next owners of Honeywell and Invensys. No where else can you find an analysis like this of the automation industry. (A similar review of the chemical industry would be VERY interesting.)

In the next section Pinto examines the marketing and sales trends in the industry and their impact on automation and end user companies. Local service and global capability are important. Again and again Pinto warns, if you are an intermediary between the automation supplier and the end user, you should shift towards being an infomediary to avoid disintermediation. (If that sounds like gibberish, you need to read Pinto).

Finally Pinto reviews the trends in technology, extrapolating into the years to come. Pinto's future includes many intelligent wireless nano-devices which self organize into complex adaptive systems capable operating at the edge of chaos. In this section I think Pinto gets carried away a bit. It is an interesting vision, but then according to many past futurists we should be traveling to work in hovercraft. The last sections of the book relive the fieldbus wars through papers and Pinto's own poems.

This book was my first exposure to Jim Pinto's writing and I'm hooked. His informative articles are thought provoking. Sometime I disagree with him, like about the self-organizing systems, but he does make you think. Now I subscribe to his e-newsletter. While this book, as a collection of columns, papers, and poems is often repetitious, that is an almost unavoidable give the format. Some of the information is dated and will only become more so, but *Automation Unplugged* is priced to own at \$25 (ISA member and non-member price at ISA .com). I rate Pinto's book a buy and an interesting read.