



Automation in the USA

# “IT’S A GAME-CHANGER!”

Three US plant and equipment manufacturers provide an insight into their success stories, revealing how they are using **Eplan** and **Rittal** solutions to make a breakthrough, leave the competition in their wake and get on the path to growth. One of these three game-changers is Brad Howell, owner of R&D Specialties in Odessa, Texas.



The economic outlook in the USA is positive. Major investment programmes such as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) are currently driving the economy forward. At the same time, the significant skills shortage is leading to a veritable wave of automation. This is creating wide-ranging business opportunities for machine and equipment manufacturers. We want to know exactly how the demand for automation is manifesting itself in panel building and switchgear manufacturing, and what challenges our customers are facing. We therefore asked three US companies operating in different sectors in Texas and Wisconsin – R&D Specialties, Usemco and Engineering Specialists – about automation requirements and solutions, and the benefits of working with Eplan and Rittal.

TEXT: HANS-ROBERT KOCH

R&D Specialties, Houston

# SUDDEN GROWTH!

In record time – less than a year, in fact – **R&D Specialties** underwent a complete technological transformation using solutions from **Eplan** and **Rittal**. The US systems integrator and panel builder based in Odessa, Texas, can finally get its business on a growth trajectory. The inspiration came from the **Rittal Application Center** in Houston.



At the Rittal Application Center in Houston, customers can see the future of panel building and switchgear manufacturing for themselves and try out applications.



Brad Howell (left), Managing Director of R&D Specialties, talking to Brian Jung, Business Development Manager at Rittal USA, at the Rittal Application Center in Houston, Texas.

**40%**

FASTER AT R&D SPECIALTIES THANKS TO SOLUTIONS FROM EPLAN AND RITTAL

It was the Rittal Application Center in Houston where we met Brad Howell at the beginning of December – surrounded by equipment boasting the latest automation technology. The friendly Texan made a good first impression with his broad shoulders, confident stance and firm handshake. The owner of R&D Specialties knows what he wants – and what he’s talking about, especially in his specialist field of panel building. Since 2011, Howell and his some 70-strong workforce have been in big

demand with oil and gas industry customers in the Permian Basin – one of the world’s largest oil reserves – and beyond. Together with his sister (not mentioned by name), he took over the company that his father had founded back in 1983.

### THE GAME-CHANGER

We are catching up with Howell back in the very place where he first stood two years ago, looking for suitable automation solutions that would help his com-

pany grow. At the Rittal Application Center, he saw for himself how software from Eplan and machines from Rittal are coordinated in practice and work together perfectly throughout the plant engineering process – from planning all the way through to production. Things moved quickly. Just one year later, he was seeing this same coordination at his own company. “Switching to Rittal and Eplan technology was a real game-changer,” says Howell. “The automation technology and software are en-

abling us to grow at last – even with the same number of staff,” he explains. This would previously have been inconceivable, as the company had reached the limits of its capacity. How can you be more productive with the same workforce? It’s hopeless! So why not simply take on some extra skilled staff? No chance! “The first-rate plant engineering skills that are needed aren’t taught at schools or colleges, and trained specialists are nowhere to be found,” complains Howell. ▶

### R&D SPECIALTIES

Odessa (Texas), USA

Since it was founded in 1983, the **systems integrator and panel builder** has been supplying UL-certified panels to **oil and gas industry** customers in the Permian Basin – one of the largest oil reserves on Earth – and beyond. Its product portfolio includes e-houses, MCC housings, rack integration solutions, battery backup systems, variable frequency drives, junction boxes and panels, including PLC panels.



## DRAMATIC IMPROVEMENT IN EFFICIENCY

### Mr. Howell, what was your initial reaction the first time you visited the Rittal Application Center in Houston?

To be honest, my team and I were concerned when we saw the ultramodern Rittal machinery. We wondered how something like that could be integrated into our existing, ageing production set-up, and also how we would manage to work with it. But the professional advice we received here gave us the answers we were looking for, showing us how Eplan software and Rittal machinery work together. We headed home feeling satisfied and realised this was the approach we needed to take.

### Why did you invest in Eplan software and Rittal automation systems?

We were looking to expand and grow, but we couldn't find suitable staff for our panel building operations. Automation is the only way for us to move forward. Eplan software and the two machines from Rittal – the Perforex MT S and the Wire Terminal WT – are speeding up our processes, making them around 40 percent faster. Efficiency has improved dramatically, so the decision was very much a success and also easy to realize.

### How have your customers reacted to this big investment?

When our customers get their first look at the machines, they're impressed. They see how the equipment operates and how much more efficient everything is. They've mentioned on more than one occasion how much better our panels look. □

“WE CAN NOW EXPAND AND GROW – WITHOUT TAKING ON ADDITIONAL STAFF.”

BRAD HOWELL, OWNER OF R&D SPECIALTIES

### SAVING OF 40 PERCENT

“Automation is the quickest and simplest route to growth. After all, it means you don't need to take on additional staff,” he continues. Since last year, Howell has been completely transforming his plant engineering operations. Two Rittal machines are in operation – a Perforex MT S for drilling and milling, and the Wire Terminal WT for fully automatic wire processing. The Eplan Electric P8, Eplan Pro Panel and Eplan Data Portal software tools ensure an unprecedented level of engineering efficiency and quality. “It now takes just eight employees to do the work that previously required 14 members of staff. That amounts to a time saving of around 40 percent,” reveals Howell.

### MAKING ALL THE DIFFERENCE

Not all that long ago, everything looked very different. R&D Specialties only took the decision to use Eplan software and Rittal Automation solutions a year ago. The Texan company had previously tried a milling and drilling machine from a different manufacturer. “But the software didn't work,” says Howell, stating one of the reasons for the lack of success. There was another reason for moving away from this manufacturer, though. “When we received the software program, there were fewer than 20,000 device data sets in the library,” Howell continues. That made switching to Eplan a logical decision for him. Thanks to the Eplan Data Portal, he now has some two

million high-quality component data sets from numerous leading equipment manufacturers at his disposal, directly from the Eplan Cloud. “I would never go back on my decision to use Eplan and Rittal,” admits Howell. □

Scan here to go to the video:

GRÖSSE CODE: 20 MM, FARBE: SCHWARZ



“THIS IS WHERE WE DEMONSTRATE HOW PLANT ENGINEERING COMPANIES CAN PROGRESS QUICKLY.”

BRIAN JUNG, BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER AT RITTAL USA

### Rittal Application Centers

## WHERE OPPORTUNITIES ARE DISCOVERED

**Data-driven industrial automation** – sounds good, but how does it actually work in practice? Our answer? Simply give it a try – at the **Rittal Application Center** in Houston or one of the other eleven centres worldwide.

During their visit, panel builders and switchgear manufacturers can find out how to make the leap into the world of digitalisation and automation, and how to prepare for the future. The centres offer them practical answers to all kinds of technical questions. In a real-life workshop environment, they work with Eplan and Rittal experts on their specific projects, test the efficiency of new workflows and see the benefits of software and automation technology at first hand – all before they consider making an investment.

Find out more

using the following link: <https://www.rittal.com/com-en/Services/Rittal-Application-Center>



The Perforex LC laser centre is ideal for the automated mechanical modification of stainless steel and sheet steel enclosures.



The start of a drilling and milling process using the Perforex BC from Rittal.



Visitors can watch the automated machining of enclosures and panels.