

Turn of the century

GAUGING Keeping up with trends in the market is key to business survival. But, as one 100-year-old company in Maine shows, taking advantage of new technology to remain competitive is also crucial. OPW's automated tank gauging system has helped Dead River stay ahead of the pack

To survive for 100 years, any company must be able to adjust to an ever-changing marketplace and be willing to try new technologies in order to keep the business moving forward. An example of this is Dead River Company, of Portland, Maine.

The company was founded in 1909 by Charles Hutchins as a timber harvester along a branch of the Dead River in western Maine. A century later, the company - still family-owned - has become one of the largest retailers of home heating oil and propane in northern New England. This did not happen by accident: it was the result of sensing a shift in existing market dynamics, identifying new opportunities and having the fortitude and wherewithal to create a new direction for the company.

How did we get here?

Since buying its first gasoline station in 1936 and then initiating a home-heating programme in the 1940s, Dead River has grown to become one of the top suppliers of home-heating products, No 2 fuel oil and propane in the states of Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont. As such, it now operates a network of 56 bulk plants and bulk distribution facilities spread out among the communities in which it retails. A typical Dead River Company bulk facility has four to six vertical aboveground storage tanks (ASTs) that are used for storing No 2 fuel oil, kerosene and on- and off-road diesel. The depots generally range in capacity from 20,000 to 60,000 gallons (75 to 225 m³), though there are some as large as 1m gallons (3,785 m³).

"We buy the product, distribute it to our bulk facilities, then our trucks pick it up from those locations and go house to house to deliver the product," explains Levi Ross, manager of supply and logistics for Dead River Company. "The re-supply of product coming into the distribution facilities is a 24-hour operation, while our delivery trucks typically load during normal working hours."

With that much product moving that rapidly through the system, tank gauging and monitoring at every bulk-distribution facility is man-hour intensive. "The majority of our locations have tape gauges that have to be read manually on a daily basis, which means that somebody physically goes out and reads the



OPW's automated tank gauging system has helped Dead River expand its services to customers

tanks once a day and then anticipates reorders based on the supply levels in the tank," says Ross.

Knowing that this tank-checking system was impacting manpower and cost-efficiencies, Ross approached Dave Blanchette, his distributor contact at The John W Kennedy Company of East Providence, RI. JW Kennedy has been a leader in supplying petroleum equipment in New England for more than 75 years. From Blanchette, Ross learned about advancements that were being made in automatic tank monitoring and gauging, including the SiteSentinel® iSite™ Automatic Tank-Gauging System from OPW Fuel Management Systems. Selecting a group of three bulk facilities that made the most logistical sense, Ross began having the iSite and OPW's Petro Vend FSC3000™ Site Controller equipment installed in July 2008.

"We had three facets we wanted to accomplish at these upgraded locations," says Ross. "First, we wanted to be able to authorise sales with a chip-key system. Second, we wanted the ability to temperature compensate our inventory and distribution. Finally, we wanted remote access to the gauging and inventory information."

Solution to the problem

The iSite was able to meet all of these

requirements because it provides the accuracy and versatility that bulk-plant operators are looking for and that isn't available in older, legacy fuel-management systems. The system is built on Windows® technology that provides the horsepower that site operators need to ensure that their sites are being managed as efficiently and effectively as possible. The iSite has been developed to offer easy, low-cost installation; easy-to-manage user interfaces; highly accurate and precise tank-monitoring peripherals; easy reconciliation of inventories and deliveries; a variety of probe and sensor options; tracking of regulatory compliance reporting; an easy-to-read LCD touch-screen with an icon-based menu structure; and the latest in communications technology that allows access to the system from anywhere in the world.

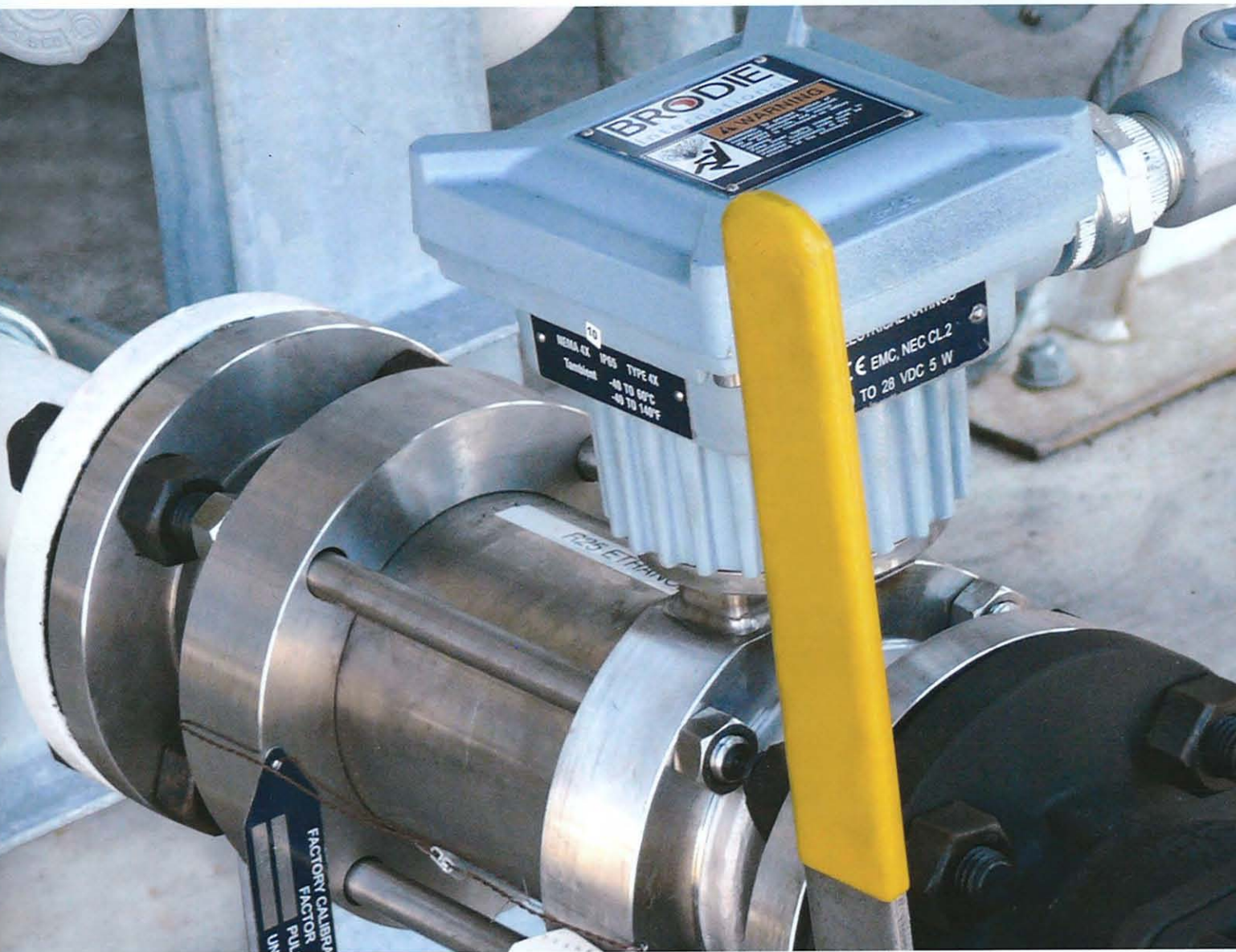
"We were also looking for a complete solution with the fewest number of vendors involved," says Ross. "The nice part of OPW's hardware is that it accommodates some of the older legacy technology and does not require us to replace every module that we have been using when we upgrade a site. Also, the security and spill regulations are becoming more rigorous with each passing season and the technology we're now using as provided by OPW can help us meet those stricter regulations."

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