

From Pilot to Commercial Operation: Good Information and Teamwork Make it Happen

A small energy company had been developing a process to generate electricity from biomass and domestic waste. With external investment they had proved the concept and they now needed to scale up from a pilot plant to a commercial operation.

As is often the case, they had the process knowledge and vision, to develop the concept, but to design, build and operate a commercially-viable plant required particular skills and experience to make that transition.

They recognised this fairly early on, but without good communication and information, this was not an easy road. Which is where MATL came in.

This is their story:

“We started a project to transform a pilot energy plant into a full-scale commercial operation, using the same team that had developed and worked on our pilot plant.

“We were fairly confident that the transition should be a straightforward relocation, while adding in some extra process stages.

“And then our financial investors started asking for specific information and documentation.

“The investors were only interested in the commercial delivery, and had little understanding or interest in the actual process, which we think is fascinating and ground-breaking.

“Once we started our dealings with the energy companies, they asked some difficult and detailed questions about our interfaces, health and safety, project programme, emissions and discharges and how we were going to operate. They didn’t seem to be satisfied with what we told them.



*“We felt that we needed someone who understood our process well, and could be sure that we could make the conversion, whilst **we** could concentrate on making the finer adjustments to get the most efficient output, and test out some other theories.*

“So we brought in a contract manager to deal with all of this. But then he also became difficult, and wanted to pin us down to fixed deliverables, a hard timescale, and to make decisions. Meanwhile the original process plant was already being dismantled and he showed us that it could be several months before it was operational again.

“What we needed was someone who understands how we think and communicate and could handle all of the discussions with the contract manager so he’d be happy, we’d be happy and could get back to doing what we always were doing.

“We were given a recommendation to contact Peter Francis and his company MAT Ltd.”

MATL were engaged by the Contracts Manager because of his prior knowledge of our capabilities.





Our initial remit was to set up a process for ensuring that documentation and information was co-ordinated and tracked properly because progress on the project had not moved forward for several months.

We found that the multiple locations of the team - with pilot development team in one workshop, the design team in an office elsewhere and the construction team on site in yet a third location - meant that each party was operating in a silo and using information which couldn't be traced. We also found that this had been ongoing for more than a year. The client had also not considered a complete plan of the process identifying the process parameters and measurement points, which should have been their fundamental

baseline so we persuaded him that it was necessary to establish one to enable everyone to understand what the outcome should be and how it worked. Once available, the whole team treated it as the central repository of all knowledge.

With increasing client confidence in our abilities, our remit constantly expanded to encompass the design of the electrical system and controls, the IT across the business, including data security, negotiation with the instrumentation, control and power suppliers, co-ordination of the installation and development of the functionality.



This illustrated that not everyone has the resource, skills or the time to bring about a change, despite being motivated to achieve it. Bringing in an independent and focused view with broad experience and an ability to engage everyone in a change enables a business to concentrate on their own area of expertise and reap the benefits of a well-executed transition.



MAT knows that the knowledge of a process is in the hands of experts – the client – but the skills to transform it may not be. We work closely with the operatives and the owners to capture the commercial intent in conjunction with the feasible needs to design and map out a workable and least-disruptive plan.

If you recognise this scenario or just want to know more, contact MAT for advice on how to drive your proof of concept to a commercial reality.



SOLUTIONS

MAT Ltd

Tel: +44 1905 888174
Web: matl.co.uk
e-mail: engineering@matl.co.uk

HOW CAN WE HELP?

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