

# EXPERT INTERVIEW

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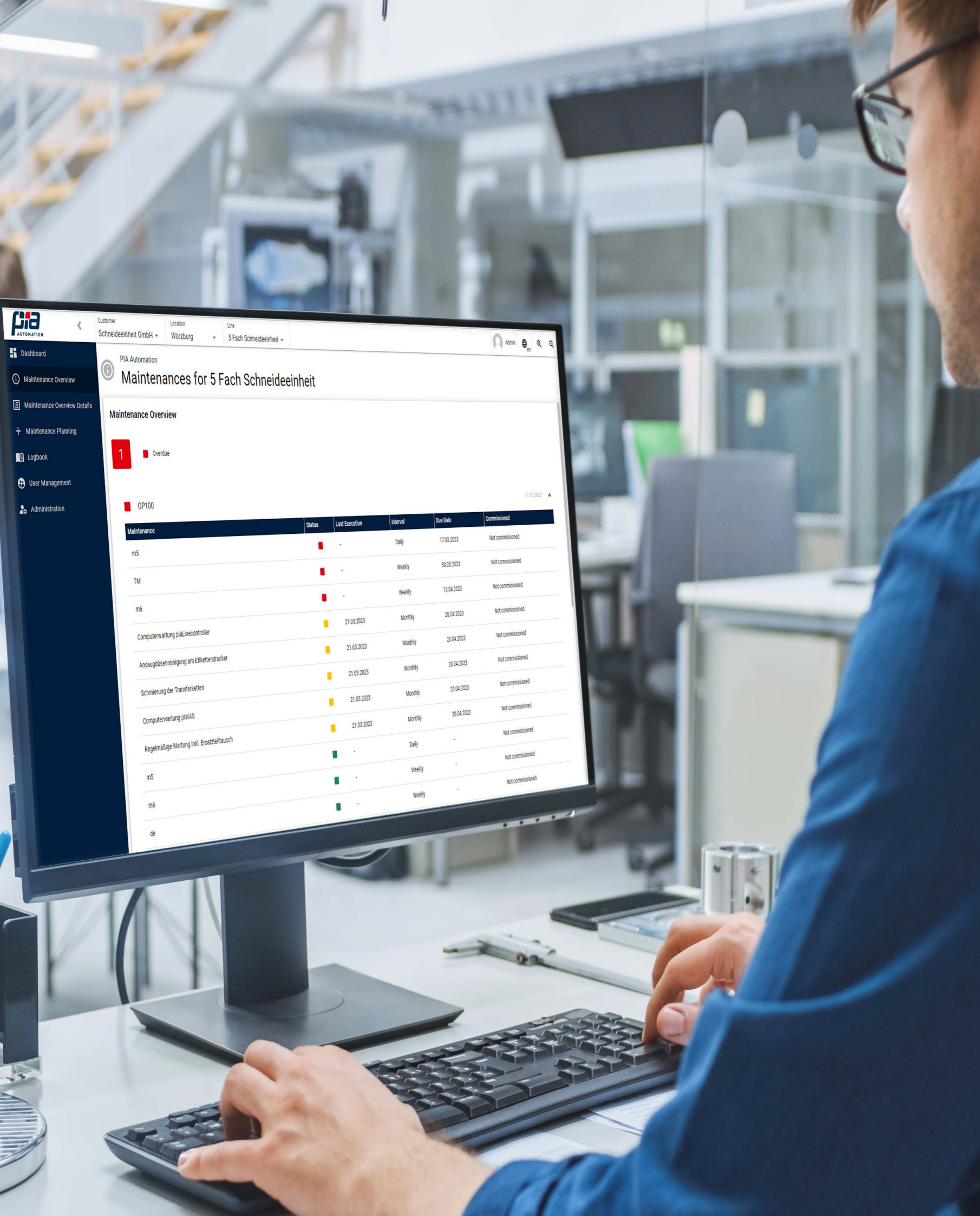
IN THIS INTERVIEW, OUR EXPERTS PROVIDE INSIGHTS INTO CURRENT TRENDS IN THE INDUSTRY AND PIA'S DIGITIZATION STRATEGY.



## **Our experts:**

Tobias Weber, Head of Software Standardization and Digitalization at PIA Automation

Stephan Verclas, Manager at Digital Enabler GmbH



# DIGITIZATION OF ASSEMBLY AND TESTING SYSTEMS

## IN THE FUTURE, SOFTWARE AND SERVICE WILL MAKE THE DIFFERENCE.

In order for assembly and testing systems to remain efficient, regular maintenance is a must. For the operators, incorporating this work into the production process entails significant time and organizational effort. Much of the work is still done manually, and there is often a lack of skilled personnel. The new Maintenance App from PIA Automation now offers a software solution that makes the management of these maintenance responsibilities more efficient and convenient. The digital maintenance plan includes, for example, appointment reminders, scheduling, instructions and central documentation of inspections and repairs. In addition, PIA is developing a Customer Service Platform (CSP) that will, in 2024, round off the digital service portfolio centered around the PIA Industrial App Suite.

In an interview, Dr. Stephan Verclas, Manager at Digital Enabler GmbH, and Tobias Weber, Head of Software Standardization and Digitization at PIA Automation, describe what they mean by “modern maintenance for assembly and testing systems.”

## WHY DOES THE MARKET FOR ASSEMBLY AND TESTING SYSTEMS NEED AN APP FOR ROUTINE MAINTENANCE?

” **Stephan Verclas:** : I’ll give you an example. Normally, an indicator will light up in your car when the next service is due. Additionally, many authorized workshops will proactively contact their customers to make an appointment for routine service. Ideally, they do this in advance so that the workshop appointment can be conveniently planned for the customer. And, even if the oil level falls too low, the vehicle will respond with a request to refill.

While common in the automotive repair fields, this type of maintenance and scheduling has hardly arrived in industry. The reality is maintenance plans are often still in paper form and maintenance planning is made yet more difficult by the increasing shortage of skilled workers. However, routine maintenance is a key success factor for achieving OEE goals. Planned maintenance means anticipating the foreseeable services – and thus preventing unnecessary costly machine downtimes.

The Maintenance App, the development of which we supported PIA Automation, precisely addresses these important issues and offers customers a reliable digital solution.

## WHAT WILL PIA OFFER ITS CUSTOMERS WITH THE PIA MAINTENANCE APP?

**Tobias Weber:** The app makes regular maintenance work on their assembly systems much more convenient for our customers. In addition to the Maintenance App, the soon-to-be-launched Customer Service Platform will include, among other things, a ticket system that our customer can use to assign maintenance tasks to our service staff. Part of this offer will also feature a request function for exchanges or spare parts.

Currently we are offering the Maintenance App that can be installed locally in the customer's system, runs browser-based and makes it particularly easy for users to keep track of upcoming or overdue maintenance work on their systems. The digital maintenance plan includes appointment reminders, planning, instructions, and documenta-

tion of the work on the system. For many customers, digital document storage in a central database that can be used by all employees is a decisive step forward compared to paper traffic.

With the upcoming Customer Service Platform, the customer can contact us with just one click of the mouse. This will allow the plant operator to quickly and easily request assistance, remote support or even order maintenance tasks from PIA. Fast, close, and easy connection with PIA Automation and the digital service portfolio via PIA Customer Service will become increasingly vital for our customers in the future, especially given the skilled worker scarcity and increasing system complexity.

## IS THE PIA SERVICE LIMITED TO ONLY THE MAINTENANCE FUNCTION?

**Tobias Weber:** The new Maintenance App is integrated into the PIA Industrial App Suite, which many of our customers already use. The suite analyzes quality and process data to ensure plant performance. For our customers, this analytical capability is important to optimize their OEE values.

In the near future we plan to add an additional app to the process data analysis and maintenance software packages that will evaluate the energy efficiency of a plant. After all, sustainability is an increasingly important factor in industrial production.



*Stephan Verclas is a manager at Digital Enabler GmbH. With their many years of experience with markets, customers and digitization technologies, the experts advise partners such as PIA Automation on the introduction of new software solutions, develop new digital services and support market launches.*

## IS THE MAINTENANCE APP ONLY INSTALLED LOCALLY IN THE CUSTOMER'S SYSTEM?

**Tobias Weber:** Yes, the app is installed locally and forms the basis for a larger architecture. As an isolated module, it informs the user about upcoming maintenance.

Once the Customer Service Platform is available and the customer implements that module, the system will be able to connect to PIA Automation. In principle, this also works autonomously.

The combination of both modules will then result in the greatest possible advantage for our customers, because, with this information, our customer service can offer support in a variety of ways. For example, with the

proactive appointment reminders, the offer and ordering of spare parts or, in the case of maintenance work, with remote support or an on-site service call. This is how we meet today's plant engineering needs:

We will not only supply the hardware, but also the software packages and services that make life easier for our customers.



## WHAT DATA WILL CUSTOMERS NEED TO GIVE YOU ACCESS TO IN ORDER TO BENEFIT FROM THESE SERVICES?



*Tobias Weber is responsible for software standardization and digitization at automation specialist PIA Automation. For him, software and services from a manufacturer make all the difference in modern mechanical engineering.*

**Tobias Weber:** Which data the customer releases to us, they will decide for themselves. Of course, if the customer does not want to give us access to data, they do not have to do so. They have the opportunity to work completely independently with both the Industrial App Suite and the Maintenance App. The upcoming Customer Service Platform will also have the ability to be used exclusively as a means of communication without access to additional data. However, if the customer wishes to use our expertise in the field of process data analysis, it will be necessary to grant us access for the period of the analysis service.

For the proactive support, which Stephan Verclas explained by using the example of the car, only information about the machine condition is required. The intelligence of our PIA Industrial App Suite and the Maintenance App is located on premises at the customer's plant, where the data is collected and processed. Then, when the system is connected to the Customer Service Platform, communication with PIA will take place in the form of messages regarding the results of the data processing. These can be, for example, upcoming events – such as planned maintenance, or trends that have been identified – such as a deterioration in plant availability. If we think one step further into the future, this database can even form a basis for potential AI applications.





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*Tobias Weber, Head of Software Standardization and Digitization at PIA Automation*

## INCREASING THE SHARING OF DATA BETWEEN PLANT SUPPLIERS AND USERS – IS THIS A CASE OF TYPICAL USE OF INDUSTRY 4.0?

**Stephan Verclas:** Sharing data can greatly simplify collaboration between plant manufacturers and plant operators as in the examples Tobias Weber has given. However, in the past, many users of production equipment prohibited manufacturers from accessing their equipment remotely because they did not see the added value. More recently, this has begun to change. We are observing a strong trend in the market to at least provide machine condition data to the equipment manufacturers. I would even say it is becoming increasingly desired by customers.

If a plant manufacturer knows the machine condition data at his plant, he can help his customer increase plant efficiency. Increasingly, plant manufacturers are also allowed to temporarily access quality and process data because it makes it possible to provide concrete assistance. The

driver of these developments is the issue of productivity. Another influence, as already mentioned by Tobias Weber, comes from the shortage of skilled workers ...

**Tobias Weber:** ... in addition, you can obtain expertise from the system supplier that you may not have as a user yourself. Our aim as a partner is to use our experience to find solutions that increase the productivity of the plant. This is one of the reasons why we are also developing the Customer Service Platform: It will allow the customer to communicate with us even faster and easier.

## WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST PAIN POINTS FOR USERS?

**Stephan Verclas:** The industry is very diverse because the applications are each unique. Every OEM is set up differently and is served by its suppliers with specialized solutions. In the context of digitalization, the question then arises as to how these isolated solutions can interact with each other. This does not start only with data security, but also with the topics of data collection and management. If you want to relate data to each other, you need a common syntax and semantics. These problems have not yet been solved, in part because of competition. In this respect, the much-vaunted Industry 4.0 is still in its infancy.

## IS IT POSSIBLE TO IMPLEMENT THE INDUSTRIAL APP SUITE ON MACHINES FROM DIFFERENT MANUFACTURERS?

**Stephan Verclas:** From the customer's point of view, the PIA Industrial App Suite offers the decisive advantage of being able to also integrate systems from other manufacturers. Diverse plant landscapes are common in the industry. In this respect, PIA Automation solves one of the major problems many OEMs experience with the Industrial App Suite, because analysis, optimization, and maintenance are possible across multiple manufacturers via this digital platform.

## WILL THE SOFTWARE CAPABILITY OF A PLANT SUPPLIER BE MORE IMPORTANT THAN ITS HARDWARE EXPERTISE IN THE FUTURE?

**Tobias Weber:** Both will be equally important. PIA Automation has many years of experience in the construction of plants. Combining this with software packages and associated services is our path into a future in which we see ourselves as a full-solution provider. I would like to illustrate this with a last example: one often hears a modern car is software on wheels. There's something to it, but you must be able to build this car first, otherwise all the software is useless. We are convinced that software performance and service quality will make the difference for the plants of the future. With our complete package of the Maintenance App plus Customer Service Platform, we are significantly moving ahead – even in this competitive environment.



# creating efficiency.

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We make high-quality products available to everyone –  
sustainable and worldwide.



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