



## Keeping production moving with smart material handling

### Highlights:

- Preventing downtime in material handling requires more than reliable hardware; it takes the right partnership
- Apex Controls supports its customers with dependable solutions designed for the industrial environment
- From panel builds to system upgrades, the collaboration between Phoenix Contact and Apex Controls reduces risk, improves efficiency, and delivers smart material handling systems designed for long-term performance

*“It’s really helped us in the long run.”*

– Brian Vaneyk, Director of Business Development, Apex Controls

### Customer profile: Apex Controls

Apex Controls got its start in a basement in Hudsonville, Michigan. “One of the four original founders found themselves without a job during an economic downturn, and some of their previous customers reached out for engineering help,” said Brian Vaneyk, Director of Business Development at Apex Controls. “They got together in the basement of one of their houses and started a business to help people out” (Figure 1).

Since that time, the company has grown. “Today, we do controls engineering, helping with automation, mainly in manufacturing,” Brian said. “We also do electrical work,



Figure 1: Apex Controls partners with businesses to improve their manufacturing processes through automation.

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including panel builds and field installs. We do a lot of material handling, food and beverage, OEM machine shops, and build the controls for custom tooling for any kind of manufacturing.”

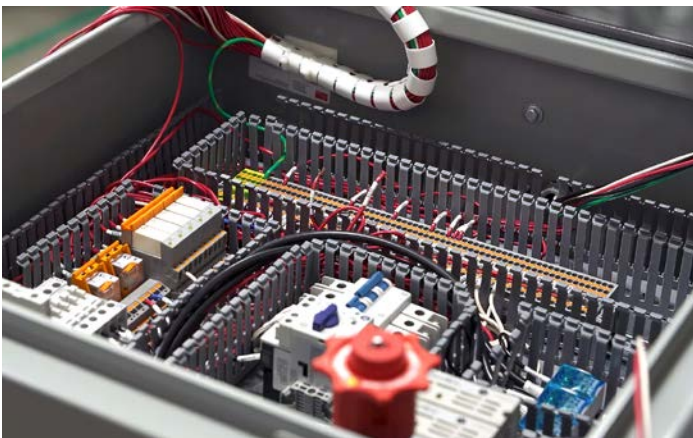
“We try to make sure we’re partnering with our customers, as opposed to a one-off job where we do the work and walk away,” said Derek Wykstra, Engineering Lead at Apex Controls. “We like to spend time working with that customer to develop a relationship, so that we know what they want for the next job.”

**Challenge: Doing more with less**

“As technology increases, material handling companies need to do more with less,” Brian said. “So we help them with energy management, help them track packages, help them store information to databases, and really get their business more efficient.”

“Lots of times in material handling, all the materials are coming in or going through some sort of pipeline,” said Brian. “If that goes down, all the operators are waiting for materials to come. It shuts down. We think about the financial impact of downtime a lot when we’re looking at machine upgrades or installing new equipment. A lot of the time, the cost justification is downtime, because it’s very expensive for companies to be down.”

“Making things transparent to maintenance and troubleshooting is one of the bigger challenges we have now,” said Derek. “My focus ends up being on transparency from electrical schematics – trying to make sure that if a machine goes down, the maintenance people in the facility can read how everything is wired so they can quickly find the components that are a problem. We’re taking complicated components, and making it easy for anyone in our shop to be able to put them together and understand what needs to be done with that design” (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Apex Controls takes complicated components and makes it easy for anyone in the shop to put them together and understand what needs to be done with the design.

Industrial settings have higher requirements than commercial jobs (Figure 3). Derek explained, “The rougher or dirtier the plant is, the more robust the components need to be. For example, you have to put more filters on your cooling equipment and have to be concerned with premature failure from temperature or vibration.”

Derek stated, “We spend a lot of time paying attention to new components and software, but you have to be able to separate the good from the hype.”



**Figure 3:** Industrial settings have higher requirements than commercial jobs.

**Solution: New technologies and a strong relationship**

“We have a really close relationship with a lot of our vendors. Phoenix Contact is a great example,” Brian said. “They’re coming out with new technologies to help us every day, and it’s hard to keep up with those changes without a strong relationship” (Figure 4).

Brian explained, “If our customers require a very high uptime, we can’t have power shutting off on the machine if there’s a brownout. We might use a Phoenix Contact UPS in that situation to keep our machines up.”

Zach Vinski, the local Phoenix Contact sales rep, regularly introduces the team at Apex Controls to the latest Phoenix Contact innovations. “He’ll bring experts in and help us configure them to get things going. Then, when we’re comfortable, we take it on.”

“We use a lot of Phoenix Contact equipment in the panels themselves,” said Brian. “Terminal blocks seem very simple, but Zach showed us some time savings – just a better way to do it.”

Apex Controls also relies on Phoenix Contact tools to help with assembly – automatic wire cutters, labelers, and hand tools.

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**Figure 4:** Phoenix Contact works closely with Apex Controls to support automation projects with dependable solutions, time-saving assembly tools, and responsive technical support that keeps operations moving.

### **Results: Functional, well-put together system**

Brian continued, “Now, we also have much quieter, low-voltage conveyors, and we’re only running the belts that need to be running. Everything else is shut off, so we use a distributed approach to a conveyor, where we can shut pieces off at a time. It’s really helped us in the long run.”

“At the end of the day, we want to hand you a functional, well-put-together system, and then have you come back to us for another one,” concluded Derek.