



Are You Having Your Best Year Ever?

More than a few gear manufacturers have told me recently that they're having the **best year** in the history of their company. At the recent AGMA annual convention, the mood was especially upbeat. Orders are up, capacity is booked, and employment levels are at or near all-time highs.

Many of the suppliers to our industry are also doing well. The major machine tool and cutting tool manufacturers are also reporting a lot of quoting and sales activity.

Our industry is benefiting from a confluence of events, not the least of which is a manufacturing resurgence that's driving the current economic recovery.

Also, there's the weak dollar, which has helped American manufacturers compete on the worldwide market.

But perhaps most importantly, there was a lot of pent-up demand resulting from the recent recession. Companies were so frightened to spend any cash, they drew down their inventories to bare-minimum levels. Consumables in plants were running on fumes.

Two major bankruptcies in the American auto industry didn't help either. Instead of investing in new projects and setting up new assembly lines, the automobile companies were forced to make do with what they had, often consuming and even cannibalizing existing inventory just to stay alive.

Now, with sales propping up the automotive companies to some sem-

blance of health, those projects have begun moving again. The result has been more orders to auto industry suppliers, including suppliers of gears as well as gear machines and cutting tools.

A number of gear manufacturers I've talked to recently—including representatives of Arrow Gear, Forest City Gear, Overton Chicago Gear and Schafer Gear, to name a few—all have shared their optimism about the current economic climate for gear manufacturers.

Of course, these are all very well respected, very well run companies that focus a lot of energy on improving processes, upgrading equipment and hiring and keeping the best talent.

One thing that these companies have all done well is differentiate themselves in the marketplace. You know that these companies are the cream of the crop, in some cases because you compete against them. But each company has also done an excellent job of communicating their strengths and unique capabilities to the marketplace. Their adver-

tising message is part of that process.

I'm well aware that the success enjoyed by these companies hasn't been enjoyed by everyone. There are probably quite a few gear manufacturing companies that are struggling out there. There are probably some who aren't enjoying the current manufacturing market transformation.

One has to wonder if they've put the same kind of effort into improving their technology, training—and yes, marketing—that these others have done. The companies mentioned above have all had a steady marketing effort over many years—through good times and bad. Each of them has had a consistent, clever, engaging print advertising campaign. They are also active with Internet marketing, including search engine optimization, e-mail newsletters, online videos and the like. It's no wonder that when the good times rolled around, everybody knew they were the go-to guys.

Maybe your segment of the market hasn't yet come around. But when it does, whose name will be rolling off potential buyers' tongues? Will it be yours, or someone else's?

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