

# Two columns for the price of one . . .

Just back from IMTS and once again, I'm struck by the enormous vitality and strength of the manufacturing sector of the U.S. economy. It has made a phoenix-like rise from the grave dug for it by pundits in the '80s and has come back more robust and competitive than ever.

True, it's not our father's factory floor on display at the show, but in most ways it's a lot better than he ever dreamed it could be. It's a lot cleaner and there's a heightened awareness of safety and health issues. Production is faster, more organized and at the same time more flexible. The new applications and processes would amaze Dad (they amaze me). The companies have a real global reach now, and the faces to be seen are from every corner of the planet. Doesn't look much like a dying sector of the economy to me.

IMTS itself gets bigger and better every two years. It now takes up all three buildings at McCormick Place, and "doing" the entire show requires the training and stamina of a triathlete. To counter the inevitable information overload caused by a show this size, the addition of "pavilions," including the one for gear machinery, are especially welcome. It was a real treat to have most major industry players all conveniently located in the North Building, where valuable

time could be spent looking at machinery and talking to the experts rather than walking through miles of other booths.

The "hot" news at the Gear Generating Pavilion was the agreement in principal between Gleason and Pfauter (see our story on p. 16). The details of this agreement have yet to be worked out, but this is a story to watch over the next few months.

Industry trends continue much the same as they were at Gear Expo last November: Dry hobbing, faster speeds and feeds, more flexible manufacturing, and the growing presence of Windows-based software for all kinds of gear applications. The other good news is the reappearance of cheerful, smiling faces among the sales staffs. Business is very good for almost everyone, a welcome change from a few years ago, when popular wisdom had our industry on life support.

*Meanwhile, back at the office . . .* Our own newest ventures, The Gear Industry Home Page™, our electronic buyers guide for gear machinery, tooling and accessories, and *Gear Technology* online, are both off to a strong start. We have had over 3000 "hits," or page requests, originating everywhere from Malta to Malaysia in both August and September. Reports from advertisers on The Gear Industry Home Page™ are also positive.



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We've now introduced our direct response forms, which allow Internet explorers to request information online. Advertisers get specific information, such as names, addresses and job titles, about inquirers, much as they would from people who fill out "bingo card" forms in print magazines.

Like everyone else on the Internet, we're learning to use this new medium as we go along. Some important facts we've discovered so far are these.

1. While the Internet doesn't make for a "paperless" office, it can radically reduce the amount of paper (and the

expense of printing) you incur to reach your customers. The print bill alone for even a simple one- or two-page brochure can run to thousands of dollars even before you mail it. The same information disseminated on the Internet costs the amount of time it takes to generate the copy and get it up on line. And you have no mailing costs at all.

2. The Internet is an infinitely flexible medium for spreading the word about your company. Changes to your information can be made in a matter of minutes, at little or no additional cost. You never have to store the extra copies of anything or throw away

hundreds of out-of-date (and expensive) versions of your literature.

3. The Internet can put you in touch with people you never dreamed would be interested in your product, ones you wouldn't necessarily find by renting a mailing list. The very public nature of this medium means that people from everywhere can check out your site with the ease of a few mouse clicks. True, you may attract some "tire kickers" this way, but you also can establish contacts with potential customers you never knew were there.

4. The people who use the Internet most right now are what marketers call "early adapters." They like new technology, and they're eager to use it. This attitude doesn't just apply to the Internet. They're just as interested in your newest products and services. They're the kind of potential buyers you want to attract.

As late as this summer, I was an Internet skeptic and let my staff talk me into this venture with some reluctance. Now that I've seen how the Internet works and the power it has to convey information about products and services quickly and inexpensively anywhere in the world, I've become a convert. The success of our own Internet ventures has convinced me that as time goes on, more and more of our business will be conducted in cyberspace. People and companies who establish their presence early and who learn how to market their companies and products on the Net will have an advantage over the competition.

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