



Where in the World is Paul Nugent?

PAUL NUGENT | MNOP

NOTES FROM THE ROAD

Associating with Success

One of the best things to happen in rotomolding in recent years is the development of a network of organizations around the world: ARMI, ARMA, ARMO, IRMA, ARMSA, LAD, CEED, SARD, AFR, AISR, ARMCE, RMCC, WHEW! While it can sometimes be tough to keep up with them, it is clear that there is a demand for what they are doing locally. Active groups are benefiting from a global network of suppliers, speakers and topics like never before and are providing the ideal forums which allow molders to gather and share knowledge and allow suppliers to reach molders in a concentrated format. Some groups are small and some are big but the best of them figure out what their customers (both molders & suppliers) want and try to give it to them cost-effectively. Starry-eyed newcomers are the easiest for them to satisfy but it is the jaded old timers that need inspiration and are the ones that the associations find hardest to satisfy.

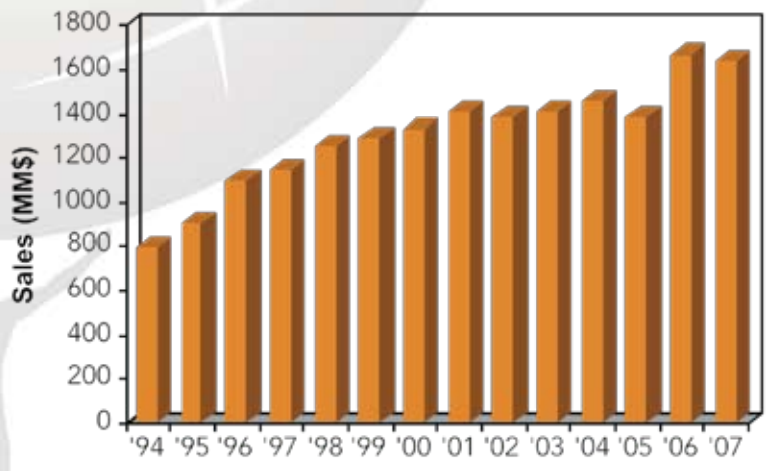
ARMANI is the latest addition to this crop of acronyms - the Association of Rotational Molders ANtarticla is proposing a new group to serve local interests. They've started out well by surveying all their existing members (1 whale, 3 sharks, 2 orcas, 14 seals and



32 penguins) one-on-one for input on how things should be run and contacted previous members (some of whom were unfortunately swallowed by other members) and potential new members personally to see what they can do to attract them. Survival in cold environments means that close contact is necessary and they are working on ways to improve trust and regular communication. A conference is scheduled for December 1 on the first iceberg north of the pole, with a call for papers due soon: fishing related topics will receive priority.

Sales Up, Margins Down

With material prices on an inexorable upward spiral, some molders are finding themselves in the bizarre position of seeing increasing sales revenue but in combination with shrinking margins. While it can be difficult to obtain accurate data on material and markets anywhere around the world, data published by Plastics News on the sales of the top 75 molder¹ the US shows that the rotomolding market there is trending to a mature level as shown below. Overall material usage in North America has reportedly changed little over the last few years which means that the recent spike in sales volume in the chart is perhaps more related to material pricing passed on to customers than true market gains





(although there were also some changes to the reported data by toymakers). Growth in new rotomolding markets may be compromised by these higher material prices and there may even be a tipping point at which some markets revert to traditional materials; for example, fuel tanks. For anyone interested in analyses of rotomolding markets, Peter Mooney of PCRS (+1 (336) 998 8004) has just completed a study of the North American rotomolding market (which interestingly points out that while material pricing is a problem there, another major impediment to growth is the ability to find and retain good people), while in Europe, Arvada (+44 (0) 1283 790820) offers a report on Central European end-user markets and AMI (+44 (0) 117 924 9442) provides an overview of molders in Europe.

Troubleshooting for Real

While I enjoy the freewheeling rotomolding approach to troubleshooting (see last month's comments), there is actually a better way that you might like to try - the scientific method. (I think the Greeks had something to do with this...)

1. Review your problem and data carefully
2. Establish a baseline - set a known, repeatable starting point
3. Formulate your hypothesis of what is causing the problem
4. Test the hypothesis one variable at a time


5. Observe everything - look around the problem as well directly at it
6. If the hypothesis still fits - check another variable
7. If it doesn't - adjust your hypothesis
8. Repeat until the cause is understood and a solution developed

Remember that while rotomolding cycles can make this a long, slow process, it is the best way.

An Irish Rotomolding Blessing

And finally, with the ARMO conference in Belfast just around the corner, a few uplifting words from Ireland's rotomolders to speed you on your way...

- May your roads be lined with barriers
- May the wind cool your molds
- May your powder flow like Guinness
- May you be a rock and not to roll
- May your parting lines clean themselves
- May you forever release and never stick
- May your tubes never clog (vents, that is)
- May your parts be straight and warpage free
- and may you be on a tropical island years before the taxman knows you're gone....



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