



# Where in the World is Paul Nugent?

PAUL NUGENT | MNOP

## Europe Out-Spending the US...?

While the Obama government is trying to spend us all into oblivion, you don't see much trickling down to R&D in the plastics world. In fact seed funding for scientific and engineering research has been steadily reduced over recent years in the US. On the other side of the Atlantic, however, European governments continue to fund R&D broadly across the community. Take two recent rotomolding projects, Micro-Melt and Rotoflex, for example. These are consortia led by research groups supported by funds from the European Union - one aimed at using microwave technology (and internal cooling water) and the other to retrofit material feeding systems to machines (through the arm?) to mold composite structures. While there are small companies in Europe who have worked on similar technologies and produced working systems for both, the availability of large resources for molders and suppliers seems to encourage new avenues to be explored by such groups with the possibility of completely new technologies to be created.

What is the situation in the US and are there any equivalents or similar funding available? There are a number of large companies who can fund their own internal work but no industry-wide collaboration to tackle generic problems or



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pursue new ideas. Over the years there have been drives to promote research at colleges in the US and a few have responded - McMaster, Penn College, Brigham Young and Calgary University are among the few groups to have explored rotomolding and tend to focus on individual company projects or pure research. The large European projects are different though and their structure encourages a research group to lead a group of molders and suppliers to tackle a specific idea - limited timescale, focused effort. They don't always produce something of immediate benefit but often trigger other ideas. Can the industry in the US go anywhere for such funding? NSF,



NIST, AIP, private sources? Didn't we have an ARM committee once-upon-a-time that was going to seek out potential funding avenues? Should we resurrect it and see what can be tapped into once again?

### Follow the Money

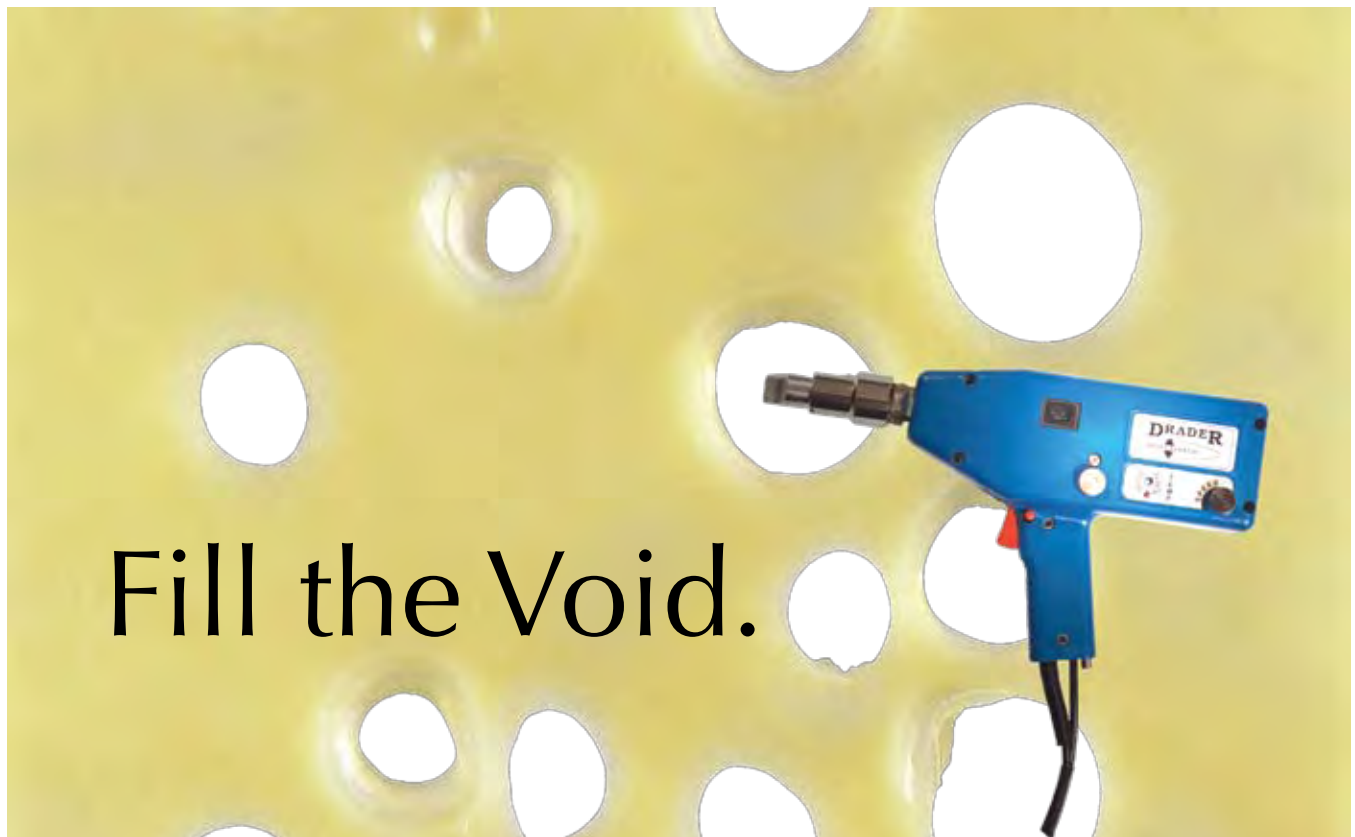
Most of the molding market is connected in some way to consumer spending and while the media brow-beats everyone into thinking recession, consumers will act out a recession. However, if you are looking for industries or products that seem to be doing well, try following the money being spent and look to the medical and military sectors, things there just seem to keep quietly rolling along...

### Rapid Assessment

Sometimes it's just nice to be home and stop moving for a while. When the world slows down for a moment, there is always extra time available to reflect on the changes taking place and a chance to plan ahead. And while it's always interesting to visit new factories and see how people have developed their approach to rotomolding, it is sometimes even more interesting to see how similar it all actually is and how

many common factors are overlooked. It is truly amazing to see how often things are repeated in rotomolding and how much time companies could save in testing and development if they asked the right questions and spoke to the right people first. Over time, I've developed a tool which I use to help me review companies when I visit - a Rapid Plant Assessment which includes over 200 questions to address all of the key areas of a molding operation from materials in-bound through molding operations to shipping. Look for flow, look for organization, look for technical knowledge and look for good training put into practice. It's a great way to highlight the good ideas being used and a memory jogger to point out more that might make an operation even more efficient and streamlined. Many molders are so focused on day-to-day issues that they don't have time to gather information from a lot of sources or figure out how the things they have heard can be put into practice - this can be a great way to see a condensed view of what is possible in rotomolding. It doesn't take long, usually a one or two day visit and it usually forms the basis of a detailed report on an action plan for improvement and development in a company. More details at my web-site if you are interested.

NOTES FROM THE ROAD



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