



The Greatest Show on Earth!

NOTES FROM THE ROAD

Four hundred and fifty attendees and forty spouses made for quite a spectacle at the global ARMO conference in Lyon last month. Indeed, the whole show was fantastic with a busy agenda of talks and tradeshow booths topped off by a terrific gala dinner held in a French chateau in the hills beyond the city complete with local delicacies, fireworks, acrobats, dancers, and painted ladies...

The gala was a coincidental extension of the Cirque du Soleil theme that I used for my main presentation. In it I explored Image, Technique, and Materials using Cirque du Soleil as an example of a company that has taken a basic concept (olde worlde circus acts) and has repackaged it in a modern form with superb execution. Their ability to combine technology and artistic skills to create a kaleidoscopic world of sensory overload has produced a world-class approach, which now dominates their sector.

Rotomolders can learn from this.

Promotion of rotomolding to the real world is sometimes less than ideal; there are adverts showing simple designs and poorly made parts, which color people's impressions of the industry as a whole; we are often simply categorized as tanks, toys, and road barriers. This needs to change to raise awareness of some of the amazing designs and products that rotomolders already make and also to plant the seeds for future designs in other markets and product areas. If we really want to tackle more complex, higher volume, more demanding parts we need to raise our game and make sure the world knows about it. No smoke and mirrors, but concentrating on features and benefits of rotomolding using well

executed and attractive parts: designers will pick up on subtle points and re-use them in new products.

Technique follows logically from Image. Cirque du Soleil are now legendary for taking the basic circus acts and pushing their limits - how many molders can you think of that really do this with our process? I am constantly asked for recommendations for molders in different markets. While my response will be affected by the number of molders located in a particular area, it is even more affected by the appearance of a molding operation (step back and ask yourself how well your operation comes across in the first minute when a new visitor enters your factory), the level of understanding of operators of their process (how much knowledge do you drive down to the shop-



>> A Thorn among Roses...

floor?), the degree to which new ideas, materials, molds, control systems, and equipment are implemented (do you only listen at conferences or do you take ideas home, and implement them?). There is a tremendous amount of technology available in rotomolding: there is sometimes sadly a tremendous lack of knowledge or interest on the part of molders to use it. Let's by all means keep looking for the new, but let's fully use what we already have.

Materials are the third element and probably the most important for future development. Rotomolding is fundamentally a polyethylene process and while there are still many applications for which it is ideal, extending our palette is critical: scratch resistance, stiffness, toughness, processability vs. cost are all features that could open up new applications. We have a small base of suppliers who are capable of adding to our choices and we need to encourage them. If we maintain a mindset of polyethylene-only pricing, it will kill new development; we are a small market in a competitive world with limited resources which will go to other larger, more receptive processes. Think value in terms of performance and the ability to solve customer problems rather than setting a 'dollar-a-pound' limit.

Operators, Supervisors, Managers

With a theme of keeping it direct and simple, I've been working

on updating my website (www.paulnugent.com) with some training courses aimed at helping molders deliver knowledge and understanding where they need it most: at the sharp end of the business on the shop-floor. Take a look, I'm always interested in feedback.

Hands-on support for operators means raising the understanding of not only the process but also the value of the tools and equipment they work with and the value that they personally bring to the operation. Simplify the work, make it clear why things matter and make it clear how important operators are.

Supervisors can benefit from a bigger picture overview. Doing Things Right the First Time is a theme of one of my seminars - focusing on key steps in the process to eliminate problems and reduce variation as far as possible. Taking the time to understand the process on a deeper level, discuss available technology, materials, and equipment that are used across the industry helps generate ideas.

Managers often need help too. We all become buried in day-to-day issues and sometimes lost in the forest of details. An outside perspective can be very helpful in providing an assessment on how well things are running, areas that may need some help, and simply offering new ideas from other unrelated industries. A Roadmap to Success provides just such an operational analysis.

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