



*Industry Expert
July / August 2009*

Additive Fabrication Continues to Surprise and Stun in Unexpected Ways

By Todd Grimm

Major advances in additive fabrication technology and materials have brought more attention to the industry and opened doors to those outside the normal engineering crowd. However, even with all the progress, recent events have reminded me of how few truly understand and embrace additive fabrication. It became more disappointing to see that even fewer appreciate that the technology is much more than that of low-cost 3D printers.

I shouldn't be surprised since it has been this way for the past two decades. I keep hoping that change will come faster, but it hasn't happened, at least not yet. The culprit of this inability to embrace the technology is simple yet sometimes insurmountable: the inherent element of human nature, reluctance to change.

I am also frustrated by companies that are struggling. They need these tools most, and yet they are the ones most likely to resist change. Those who need all the help they can get to survive the down economy are the ones that are likely blind to the opportunity.

But, as a reader of this newsletter, I know that thankfully, you aren't one that has turned his back on additive fabrication. You are still in the minority and are undoubtedly benefiting because of it. You have experienced all the value of additive fabrication; you know that the benefits go far beyond reduction in time and cost. Having adopted the technology, you are extending your advantage over your competitors. You are still investing in innovation and R&D while they are slashing product development budgets.

It doesn't matter if you just got started with additive fabrication or if you were doing it seven years ago when APP first opened its doors. Just by using it, you are ahead of the pack, and you are doing things more effectively and efficiently. You have the advantage.

So, what reminded me of this shocking truth? It was mingling amongst those outside of my usual circle. Conversations at the recent SME annual conference and observations at the inaugural TC Expo drew my attention to the slowness of change.

At the SME annual conference, a room full of manufacturing and engineering professionals were stunned to learn of "recent" advancements in systems, materials and applications. Things that are taken for granted by additive fabrication practitioners were astonishing to this audience.

At the TC Expo, which was co-located with NPE, I had the pleasure of keynoting the conference. In the presentation room, I experienced the same reaction as that in the SME meeting. Those that live and breathe plastics and molding were rather ignorant on the topic of additive fabrication. And on the show floor, you could see the plastics professionals give additive fabrication a quick glance or a quizzical look. You could see in their eyes that they had made up their minds a long time ago using information that is no longer accurate.

Don't get discouraged just yet. This story has an upside, growth. There is still a lot of room for growth in the additive fabrication industry, and it is far from being stagnant and mature. This means that you have plenty of time to capitalize on your advantage while the majority slowly sees the light and adopts the technology.

That future growth also means that all of us "old-timers" will see further advancements in the technology and materials. We will continue to see increases in the applications that present themselves and in the benefits we realize. Of course, this will attract more newcomers. Bringing them into the fold means more money for R&D, which means even better things for the future.

So, stay tuned, stay focused and stay positive. You are at the forefront of the wave of the future. Hold on tight and enjoy the ride.

P.S. Congratulations to APP for seven years of success, growth and exceptional work.

Todd Grimm is president of T. A. Grimm & Associates, Inc. (Edgewood, Kentucky), a consulting and communications organization that focuses on additive fabrication and 3D scanning. Contact him at (859) 331-5340 or visit www.tagrimm.com.