

Change is continually occurring all around us and whether it is related to changes in employment, energy, politics or fashion trends, it is an unstoppable force. I heard a phrase recently that has stayed with me; *with change comes opportunity*. Sometimes the winds of change force us from our comfort zone into unfamiliar territory where we are forced to learn and adapt and ultimately grow. Charles Darwin said, "It's not the strongest of the species that survive, or the most intelligent, but the ones most responsive to change."

In the rapid prototyping industry, change is an inevitable necessity and if you are not responsive, you will be left behind to become an RP memory. In fact, even the term *rapid prototyping* is becoming outdated. It is being replaced or redefined by the term *additive manufacturing* due to the advanced properties of the latest generation of materials on the market. With each passing year, these materials are yielding parts that are no longer merely prototypes but serve as functional models that in some cases can be used as production parts. The equipment used to manufacture these models is becoming faster and more accurate, more innovative ways of online quoting are being designed, and lead times have gone from weeks to days to yesterday. The rapid prototyping industry has become a fiercely competitive market with new bureaus and online brokers springing up, barraging customers with so many choices they are left with their heads spinning.

APP has definitely experienced a fair amount of change over the past six years growing from a small service bureau with one machine to a bureau that has three locations, a global customer base and is rapidly approaching 10 million in sales. We have added additional, state-of-the-art machines in both Tulsa and Anaheim, expanded our portfolio of services and additional staff. Over the next few months, we will be implementing additional website and internal changes to further enhance our customers' experience and the efficiency with which our parts are produced.

Some highlights of these changes to come include upgrading to the new iPro<sup>i</sup> SLA<sup>®</sup> system from 3D Systems and implementation of a new internal software system. This software system will further enhance the already efficient production process by facilitating faster order processing and ensuring all parts are 100% trackable through each step of the production process. It will also allow customers the ability to get real time status for their projects in our shop. Some exciting enhancements to our online quote system will include real time shipping quotes from leading shippers like Fed Ex and UPS complete with real time tracking of packages once they have left our shop. Customers will have the option to insure their packages through APP to protect their investment should something occur while the package is in transit. Customers will also be able to quote multiple services and materials within the same quote and will have the ability to save and store orders in their account cart for quick ordering later. With increased account managers on staff, customers will begin to see even more personal attention than already received. They will be able to spend more time with their account manager discussing their current and future projects in detail including new technologies, materials and production methods available to them. APP's monthly newsletter, *The Digital Digest*, is also going through a change and will have a new look and format and will include more industry news and events than before along with useful information for our customers from participating partners. These are just a few of the more exciting highlights that will have a major impact on our customers and their experience with APP.

When deciding what changes to make and the schedule for implementation, I realized just how difficult the months ahead would be. I then remembered Winston Churchill once said *"A pessimist sees difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty."* Rather than focusing on the difficulty of overseeing these changes and other things, I am taking the advice of Mr. Churchill and focusing instead on the new opportunities for growth, customer satisfaction and increased market presence. I see new opportunities everyday and am thankful APP has the dedicated, competent staff to make my visions come to fruition. They accept every challenge that I or their customers present to them without ever considering the possibility that it cannot be done. At APP, we welcome the opportunities brought to us by forging down new paths rather than the comforts of the worn trail we left behind.