



Machining

Manufacturing Spotlight: Big Ideas, Big Opportunities

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By Steve Plumb, Senior Editor, SME Media

In a wide-ranging Q&A with *Manufacturing Engineering (ME)*, MSC CEO and President Erik Gershwind, along with Kim Shacklett, Senior Vice President-Sales and Customer Success, and Jamie Goettler, Senior Director of Metalworking Sales and Innovation, share their insight and vision about the company's legacy, customer initiatives and the future of manufacturing.

ME: Manufacturing is changing at an unprecedented rate. What's MSC's competitive advantage in such a dynamic market?

Gershwind: I'll start by talking about what hasn't changed, and that's our values. This goes back to my grandfather, who believed in respecting and caring for people, focusing on the customer and living life with integrity. He didn't sign contracts; a simple handshake was good enough. Of course, times have changed but our core values remain the same. Another principle my grandfather believed in is what we refer to as reinvention, the idea that you can never stand still—every so often you have to reimagine your business while keeping your values. Also, as a family-led business, we're better able to take a long-term approach. Whereas public companies tend to change leadership about every seven years, we've only had four CEOs in our history. This allows for a consistent customer-focused mission and strategy.

ME: How do you define innovation and help drive it?

Goettler: I quickly learned that innovation doesn't always need to be something technological or futuristic. While we indeed work on a variety of advanced technologies, there's also an aspect of innovation that may just be a different way of approaching a problem. Our MachineMax Pro™ is a great example. It's a multi-product and multi-brand certificate program that can be bundled with the purchase of a machine to quickly help customers optimize efficiency and performance based on their needs, starting on Day 1.

Gershwind: Manufacturers are bombarded with new things on a daily basis, whether it's Industry 4.0 or 5.0, automation, additive manufacturing, artificial intelligence, machine monitoring or composite materials. It can really be overwhelming, especially for shop owners and smaller companies. So, we view ourselves as a conduit and partner to help customers navigate innovation and the technology landscape. The key is not to fall in love with a specific technology, but to identify what will best help a customer save money and generate revenue. We can't do it all ourselves, so we partner with world-class organizations to distill these technologies down.



Erik Gershwind



Kim Shacklett



Jamie Goettler

ME: What are some of the biggest challenges you face as MSC continues to expand its business?

Shacklett: Well, I try to think of every challenge as an opportunity. So my focus every day is on how we can help our customers overcome all of their challenges and turn them into opportunities. This means we have to fully understand their strategic objectives, which are constantly evolving. We have to be a trusted partner and align with their priorities. This requires earning a seat at the engineering table, so we're at the forefront of the planning phase for new projects. That's a great opportunity to fuel customer success and help solve some of the challenges they face.

Goettler: I agree 100% with Kim. The three most important things we can help customers with are profitability, throughput and productivity. And we have to be prepared to adapt to current events such as COVID and remote workers, as well as workforce development and the skills gap.

ME: What's MSC's role in the market, and how is it evolving?

Shacklett: The beauty of our product offering is the way we partner with our supplier community, which is a critical element of our business. We work with high-quality, well-known brands that have great products coming out of their R&D departments that help us bring solutions to customers. And we can do it in a very unbiased way. We don't just sell one solution—we offer many different products and technology options to help solve problems. ... We work closely with our supplier partners to provide the best solution for our customers' needs and applications.

Gershwind: Our North Star is to improve life for North American manufacturing: "Built to Make You Better." But there's an even greater opportunity; we need to think bigger in terms of the impact we can have. Not just in terms of our customers, but how manufacturing impacts the world, such as the movement toward ESG—environmental, social and governance—initiatives.

I think there's a role that we have yet to figure out over the next decade about how MSC can help lead this effort, along with others, where manufacturing is a major influencer in creating a better environment, such as reducing the industry's carbon footprint. The potential is very exciting and impactful.

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