5 Quick Questions: Software Investment Priorities

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Interview with Tom Comstoc, Executive Vice President of Worldwide Marketing, Product Management & Strategy, Apriso

Tom Comstock of Apriso offers perspective on making manufacturing more attractive and how software investments can play a key role.

Tom Comstock is the executive vice president of worldwide marketing, product management and strategy for Apriso, a provider of wide-reaching manufacturing software solutions. Comstock and his company have visibility throughout the manufacturing sector, and with a company name that is derived from the Spanish term for quickly, he would seem to be the perfect candidate for our latest “5 Quick Questions” segment.

Q: Generally speaking, where do you think software investments can have the most impact in terms of manufacturing and production? Product design and development?

A: Today, manufacturers want to improve collaboration and agility across their operations. The best way to accomplish this goal is by implementing a platform-based manufacturing operations management solution. Enterprise Manufacturing Intelligence solutions are another hot area for investment, primarily due to the improved decision support and real-time visibility now possible.

Product design decisions can also be improved with greater collaboration across departments, sites and functions. Establishing feedback loops between design and execution can have a big impact on the effectiveness of continuous process improvement initiatives.

Q: Integrating solutions that match company needs with a global footprint is a challenge, to say the least. What steps do the smart companies take for a smoother, global integration process?

A: Today, leading manufacturers recognize that a Center of Excellence (COE)

strategy offers the greatest potential to integrate operations, resulting in improved responsiveness, continuous improvement and effectiveness on a global scale. Firms embracing this approach typically have “super” users at each plant that work closely with a centralized COE team, supported by executive involvement.

Q: Much has been said about the BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) countries and the opportunities they represent. What do you feel are the most important, emerging economies that manufacturers should target for growth?

A: No one can predict the future. Just as it makes the most sense to have a diversified stock and bond portfolio, manufacturers should balance their “production portfolios” to serve as many possible markets as possible and be as flexible as possible to respond quickly to changing market conditions. Those organizations that can best execute a Design, Build and Sell anywhere strategy can better shift their production and output, and will reap considerable competitive advantages and profits.

Q: Which manufacturing sectors do you feel are best positioned for short-term and long-term growth?

A: The automotive industry is in an interesting transition today, forced to explore new energy options to meet the ever-increasing mileage requirements set by the U.S. government. As the U.S. market is so big, this requirement impacts nearly every auto maker and their suppliers. At the same time, the industrial equipment market appears poised for a strong comeback. The credit crisis that occurred a few years ago deferred many purchases which can now be completed.

Q: If you could give U.S. manufacturing one thing, what would it be?

A: Attractiveness. Manufacturing hasn’t been seen as the next “in” career move for recent college graduates, with many preferring instead to get into hi-tech, financial services or other “hot” fields. I would argue that today, manufacturing is undergoing an exciting change whereby new innovations are poised to really change the way products are designed and made. With this change comes opportunities of which the younger generation might be well advised to take note.

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