Feeding The Monster

By Jeff Reinke

At the risk of sounding hypocritical, let me say that although I'm well aware of rising energy costs, and, in particular, escalating oil prices, it will probably still be some time before I'm driving a non-fossil fuel powered vehicle. It's not that I don't see the benefits of a hybrid, but the operating costs and repair procedures are still more expensive than a traditional vehicle, and to be honest, I like the power and performance that most hybrids lack. In short, I fully admit to buying, and with little remorse, a fair amount of gas.

That said, I'm still disappointed to see the type of promotion Chrysler has chosen to offer new car buyers. It seems they might have something to learn from the processing industry when it comes to shifting paradigms and finding new revenue streams.

Perhaps you've seen their $2.99/gallon gasoline program where they revel in an ability to "re-fuel America" with lower-priced gas. The program entails the use of a gas card, wherein the user pays no more than $2.99/ gallon. Now, if I was in the market for a new Chrysler vehicle and had the ability to capture fixed-rate fuel for the next three years, I'd jump on it. I don't blame anybody for taking advantage of the offer. Rather, my disappointment is fixed on a company with shrinking sales, lower profits and a disappointing response to both.

The manufacturing marketplace has benefited tremendously from bio-fuel advances - both in terms of utilizing alternative fuels internally, as well as in creating and processing these energy sources as a new profit opportunity. However, instead of touting the advancements in alternative fuels, or any other technology the company offers in its products, Chrysler has instead made a significant investment in providing their customers with cheaper gas.

Here's where my problem dwells. You have to wonder what types of research and development initiatives could be funded with the amount of money Chrysler will be spending on this fuel initiative. I understand that the company needs to see a sales spike, but instead of pursuing long-term solutions, improving current alternative fuel technology to make it more affordable, or improving their products in order to better position their company, Chrysler has chosen to feed the gas/oil monster that impacts us all on a number of economic and social levels.

It just seems like a step backwards to me. Instead of working to shift our society from oil dependence, this type of program stifles innovation and lets people like me take the easy way out, again. With energy prices continually going skyward, we can't be afraid to pursue new options, and it seems to me that those who continue to research, develop and create these types of offerings will be much better positioned than those who take a short-sighted approach to giving customers what

they want, instead of what they really need.

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