



Take This with a Grain of Chaos

“Take this with a grain of salt” is that old saying you use when you offer up some advice that may or may not apply, that comes from a dubious source, or which bears skepticism. This year’s annual State-of-the-Gear-Industry survey is like that, but not because we did a poor job of it, and not because we doubt the sincerity or business acumen of our respondents, but rather, because the survey happened to come at a very turbulent time.

Most of our survey responses came in between January 15 and January 25. Smack in the middle of that was the inauguration of President Donald J. Trump. Normally after a presidential election, there’s a sense of closure—a clear sense of direction and a feeling that we know what to expect over the next four years. Business returns to a sense of normalcy.

Not so this year. Already we’ve seen massive tariffs threatened, rescinded and enacted against trading partners large and small. We’ve seen entire government agencies shuttered over a weekend. It’s hard to know what might be coming next.

I’d like to be clear that this is not a political criticism or commentary. I’m not offering up judgment about whether any of this is right or wrong, necessary or even legal. My real point is that, for good or bad, Donald Trump makes planning more difficult and prognostication near impossible.

And he’s not the only disruptive factor. There’s still conflict in Ukraine, the Middle East and central Africa. Even without trade wars, there’s a lot going on to challenge supply chains.

Add to that the potential disruption of new technologies. Artificial intelligence is clearly on a lot of people’s minds, as is robotics. And while the big push for electric vehicles is still very real, the rollout, consumer acceptance and political support have all diminished.

In our annual surveys, the gear industry has always skewed towards the optimistic. Despite everything that’s going on in the world and all the potential disruptions out there, this trend remains true this year, with 78 percent of respondents expressing some level of optimism about their future (compared with 74 percent last year).

The chaos is definitely represented in the rest of our statistical results. The trendlines go every which way.

To me, the true value in the survey is in the insights offered in the comments sections. You can get a real feel for what’s on the industry’s mind by reading the open-ended comments. Our editors rely on your comments to help guide our coverage over the coming year. You can use those same comments to get a feel for what the rest of the industry is thinking.

We’re pleased to present our annual State-of-the-Gear-Industry survey. It begins on page 28. Just remember to take it with a grain of chaos, and let me know what you think at stott@agma.org.



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