

Is Gear Expo Worth It?

If you read the press clippings (even our own), and listen to the comments of many of the major exhibitors, you'll hear that Gear Expo 2005 was a resounding success.

After all, many of the exhibitors told us they did extremely well. At times, the show seemed downright busy, particularly at the booths of some of the larger exhibitors. Sometimes, though, it just looked busy because the booth's sales reps often outnumbered the actual customers. For example, there were twice as many people from Gleason at the show as there were from all the divisions of General Motors, according to the show's registered attendee list.

Of course, everyone likes to put the best possible spin on things, especially when they've just finished spending thousands, tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars on the show—and believe me, that's what some of the exhibitors spend.

The sad truth is that just 1,400 people—other than the exhibitors—came to Gear Expo. According to official registration numbers, there were 2,500 people at the show, but 1,100 were exhibitors, and although the 30 or so gear manufacturers who exhibited are potential customers of the other 150 exhibitors, the fact remains that this is a small show. Despite what exhibitors are saying publicly, a fair number of them, both large and small, are grumbling. They're disappointed by the amount of energy and money they have to spend on a show that attracts so few.

So when I sit back and think about all the resources being spent on Gear Expo, coupled with how few of you actually go, I can't help but think that the money might be better spent elsewhere.

Don't get me wrong—I've always been a champion of the show, and I still am. This year, our magazines spent a lot of time prepping you for the show. I used this space to encourage you to attend. I believe that Gear Expo provides the greatest collection of gear knowledge, experience and expertise anywhere in the world, all gathered in one building. I believe there's a lot to be gained by attending Gear Expo, whether you design gears, make them, process them, buy them or use them. But judging by your lack of attendance, most of you must feel otherwise.

So where were you? Why didn't you come to the show? I know you're out there, because you continue to subscribe to our magazines. You visit our websites and use the buyers guides there. If *geartechnology.com* can attract 25,000 visitors per month, and *powertransmission.com* can attract 50,000 visitors per month—visitors who are interested in many of the same products and services that were found at Gear Expo—why did Gear Expo attract only 1,400?

I know you're all busy. Manufacturing is extremely competitive these days. But surely you haven't solved all your gear-related problems. I'm certain that a day or two at Gear Expo could have been extremely productive for you and your company.

I have to place at least some of the blame on the AGMA itself—for not getting the word out, for not communicating clearly the advantages of attending, for not selling the show to you, the potential attendees.

Sure, the AGMA has advertised the show throughout the year, including full-page ads in the front of this magazine. Problem is, many of those ads weren't aimed at you, the customers. For most of the year, the AGMA used its advertising to try to sell floor space to potential exhibitors. I kept waiting and waiting and waiting for the advertisement telling people why they should attend the show.

If Gear Expo is to continue, AGMA is going to have to realize that the success of the show depends upon foot traffic, not booth sales and not fall back on counting the exhibitors. In the commercial world, we must be sure our customers are successful with our products—not just consider them a sales opportunity.

However, there may be other reasons why so many people missed Gear Expo. Those reasons might be no one's fault.

Maybe the gear industry is just too small to support a big machine tool show. Maybe all of you were just too busy cutting gears this year. Maybe you already know all the suppliers and don't feel like there's anything new to learn by attending the show. If so, I can't say I blame you for staying away.

This year, at least one major machine tool manufacturer pulled out of the show. Nachi had reserved space early but changed its mind. Over the years, the major exhibitors have brought less and less gear cutting equipment. Some of them this year told us they had brand new machines, but they couldn't show us the machines because they didn't bring them. To see them, we would have had to go to EMO.

In light of all this, is Gear Expo sustainable?

I often say that I'd appreciate your comments. This time your comments are a must-have. If you went to the show, tell me why it's still worthwhile for you. If you didn't, tell me why. I'm concerned about the show's future, and you should be, too.

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