

Time to Turn the Page!

Matthew Jaster, Senior Editor

My favorite book as a very young lad was *The Monster at the End of This Book* by Jon Stone and illustrated by Mike Smollin (1971) that involved Grover from *Sesame Street* begging children to stop turning pages to avoid the terrible, ferocious blue beast that waited patiently on the last page. Spoiler alert: it was Grover the whole time and the reader had absolutely nothing to be afraid of.

2020 has had a completely different picture book vibe.

Each month that passed the news became worse. No travel, no large gatherings, no cinema, no sporting events, you know how March–June played out, I'm sure I don't need to remind anyone that it was an awful period of time.

COVID-19 sucked the fun and sun out of most of 2020, taking great manufacturing/engineering events like IMTS in Chicago and Hannover Messe in Germany out and putting them in a home office near you.

My booth visits to learn about new technology were replaced by online video presentations with Internet speeds that felt like I was logging into AOL in the early 1990s. I spent some serious quality time with that one guy eating potato chips during virtual meetings (crunch, crunch, breathe, crunch, crunch breathe).

Enough is enough.

I'm not only turning the page on 2020—I'm taking the year completely out of the equation I call life. I wasn't prepared to live out *12 Monkeys* or *Contagion* this year, I simply wanted to write about manufacturing and engineering technologies that fascinated me.

But guess what? I still did.

Somehow—through this post-apocalyptic carnage—I managed to stay extremely productive even though I was spending a majority of my time in one room in the house (the secret—and don't tell anyone this—is bourbon, lots of bourbon).

In 2020, I scheduled phone interviews while my kids screamed about math problems in the background. In 2020, I interviewed world leaders of bearing technology while my dog barked at our mail lady. In 2020, I played a weekly Zoom game in my head trying to figure out how many people were *actually listening* to the topic at hand—apparently, not potato chip guy.

I probably learned **more** about gear and power transmission technology in 2020 because I could attend additional events virtually.

Sure, there was a learning curve at first, but at one point in October I was attending three events at once, via a desktop computer, a laptop, and an iPad. My desk looked like the bridge of the Starship Enterprise. I found the IoT solutions webinar I was attending at the time extremely ironic.

I was no longer just learning about IoT—I was assimilating.

The world sucked this year, plain and simple. I miss trade shows. I miss listening to an engineer in-person get excited about a new technology. I miss having a pint with my buddies from England and Germany after a five-day exhibition marathon.

Through the pandemic, we've all learned to adapt to the new world we'll be facing in the future. And I'd like to think we're better prepared thanks to some of the tools and technologies available today.



It's no coincidence that we try to emphasize the need for companies to invest in automation, IoT, robotics and additive manufacturing in the pages of this magazine—the pandemic proved that smarter manufacturing keeps the front door open and the products moving out of the warehouse.

So goodbye 2020. The monster wasn't at the end of this book, it's been with us the entire year.

The trick is to find new and creative ways—both physically and mentally—to maintain just a hint of normalcy.

And just keep turning pages. **PTE**