

M&E: Nick, thanks for agreeing to give one of your first interviews to *Maintenance and Engineering*. Perhaps you can begin by telling us what took you so long to come into contact with the world of manufacturing and engineering?

Thanks for the opportunity. As you know, I am not a manufacturer or an engineer – my background and experience is in media. In fact my very early career was spent in corporate banking but I quickly realised big corporations and certainly big banks were not for me. In 1994 I started my own publishing and events company and grew this over the next 11 years to a business with offices in Chicago, Singapore, Australia and of course the UK. I sold that business in 2005 and after a break and some charity work decided I wanted to get back into the fray! I was brought into

different – very different. At almost every facility I have visited (I hate the word factory) there is a palpable, heartfelt and deep-seated passion amongst the management and the workforce for the business – and for the business of actually making stuff. You just do not get this level of engagement, commitment and understanding in other sectors. I know – I have seen them and they are just not the same. This passion is incredibly powerful and totally infectious – and I have got this bug!

M&E: Is there one person or event that stands out in your mind – if so, why and how did this affect you?

It is difficult to highlight just one person as there have been so many. Mike Gregory at Cambridge University has certainly been one, as has Alan France at Idhammer, Norman Bodek, Dave Ward at BAE and though I have never met him Eli Goldratt's books are very easy to engage with. However, Dr Alan McLenaghan at Saint Gobain Glass was the one person above everyone that really made me think about the future of UK manufacturing and how vital it is that young people are enthused about manufacturing.



Nick Hussey

The common perception of manufacturing in the UK is of a dying profession that belongs to a by-gone age which the current generations shows no interest in. Who can blame it if what comes to mind are images of dirty, dingy factories with disinterested drones going through their daily drudgery for a meagre salary. So why would **Nick Hussey**, a successful businessman with no manufacturing or engineering background, end up so passionately committed to UK manufacturing that he took on the role of challenging this perception through the newly established Manufacturing Insight?

Challenging the Perception of UK Manufacturing

the company that published *The Manufacturer* magazine. It is here that I became really exposed to the world of UK manufacturing.

M&E: What was it that created such an interest and passion in manufacturing?

Throughout my career, even during my banking days, I have been privileged to visit hundreds of truly world-class companies across many sectors. What became abundantly clear to me when visiting manufacturers is that they are

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City and this causes real problems for innovative young manufacturers that will frequently end up disposing of the crucial IP they have developed just as the product is proven and the manufacturing opportunity presents itself. I know the Technology Strategy Board, amongst others, is addressing this issue and making a real difference. I also think the way the mainstream media report on manufacturing hinders development, even amongst the manufacturers themselves. If you are told things are bad often enough you can't help but begin to believe it!



M&E: So as an almost outsider looking in, you have a somewhat unique view of UK manufacturing. How do you see it?

My succinct view is that British manufacturing is hugely misunderstood by the general public and that the reality is we are truly world-class. Modern UK manufacturing is amongst the most efficient and competitive in the world – it has had to be to survive.

M&E: Where can we improve – and how?

There are always things we can improve. To begin with, we are hampered by the short-termism of the

M&E: *What are the biggest opportunities and threats currently facing UK manufacturing?*

We have lived through a global crisis that has rocked the economic world, making governments and business re-evaluate their strategies. Manufacturing is back at the top of the agenda and we need to seize the opportunity to ensure the debate and action drives a dynamic and successful UK manufacturing sector into the future.

Opportunities lie in advanced manufacturing, low carbon, nano-technology, food development, bio and pharma and many others. But we must be wary of being sucked into making the same things the same way as everyone else. The key is differentiation through innovation and design, something we have a proud tradition of being good at. But we also need to maintain a bright, skilled workforce to drive that innovation in the face of global competition. We must ensure the existing collaborative relationships with our universities continue to ensure we capture future opportunities.

M&E: *Looking ahead, how do you see UK manufacturing in 5 years time? What do manufacturers need to be facing up to now in order to be ready for the challenges of the future?*

I would like to think we will have weathered the worst of the storm and come out stronger, fitter and bigger than

We need to get some of the passion I see in manufacturing on to the news pages and in to the consciousness of kids, parents, teachers and careers advisers.

There are already some excellent initiatives and programmes aimed at school children to increase awareness of the potential and opportunities in the sector. For instance, those run by STEMNET, the Smallpeice Trust and EngineeringUK, and the MAKE IT campaign are just what is needed. However, the depth and breadth of the careers available within manufacturing is less well defined and the career paths are often unclear. With parents as the principal influence on their children's career choices we must ensure that they understand what manufacturing has to offer.

M&E: *What are the main challenges you face in fulfilling your role and how do you plan to overcome this?*

Changing the current perception of the industry will be the main challenge! With a small team we have a lot of work to do to linking manufacturers, trade bodies, educators and government to make it happen. But we have significant support and backing – and the impetus was driven by industry. I am confident that manufacturers want to see this perception change succeed but we need their ongoing support – both practical and financial.



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before. I think we must be realistic and sensible and accept that with some exceptions the age of mass low-skilled employment in manufacturing is over. It would be wrong to forget our rich heritage, but it is vital we look ahead. Our manufacturing future lies in producing sophisticated and innovative products that have clear advantages over the competitive offerings.

M&E: *Manufacturing Insight only recently came into being. Tell us more about it and its role with respect to UK manufacturing.*

At the heart of Manufacturing Insight is the drive to change the perception of manufacturing. As I have touched on already, the perception that children, young adults and the wider population as a whole have of manufacturing is crucial to the development and success of the industry. The evidence is that the average person in the street thinks we “don’t make anything in the UK any more”. This has huge, wide-ranging implications for the industry, for the economy and for skills. We simply have to change it – that is my job and the job of Manufacturing Insight.

M&E: *How do you plan to achieve this?*

Firstly we need to work in collaboration with manufacturers and industry bodies to tell the real stories of UK manufacturing. Right now there are too many untold stories.

M&E: *Coming to an end, where would you want to see the Manufacturing Insight in 5 years time?*

I would like to think we will have significantly improved the public's perception of manufacturing such that our role is now focussed on further incremental improvements to an already strong understanding of manufacturing.

M&E: *What would you want your contribution to have been?*

I would like to have been the catalyst that set us on the right path, thereby enabling manufacturers to get the truth about manufacturing out to the public.

M&E: *Lastly, if you had 10 minutes with every manufacturing MD in the country, what 3 general items of advice would you want to share?*

I am sure there is nothing I could tell them that they do not already know, but what I would want to share is their passion and commitment. I'd like them to share their experiences representing a huge and important part of the UK economy. It is these personal stories and enthusiasm that we need to inspire the next generation. ✨ nhussey@btinternet.com

manufacturing insight