

This e-mail is a response to question number 1 -- What are the key problems and issues facing small U.S. manufacturers and their competitiveness and opportunities for growth in the near-term (1-2 years), mid-term (3-5 years) and/or long-term (>5 years)?

Response:

One of the lessons all of us are learning is that we live in a global village where distance and time have little meaning ... and where everyone is a neighbor. Today "stuff" can be bought electronically and transported around the world in a day or less.

If small U.S. manufacturers are to succeed in our ever-changing marketplaces, there are two major questions they must address now (*in the near term*) – Do I want to focus only on my current group of customers most of whom are in the domestic U.S. marketplace? ... or Do I want to take care of the needs of a larger group of customers both in the U.S. and the global marketplaces?

Before answering these questions, small U.S. manufacturers have several related questions they must consider.

First, what do my current customers want and/or expect? How have their needs and desires changed?

Second, what changes or new products and/or services, if any, do I want to make to satisfy my customers?

Third, am I able to expand my business to broader and probably different markets?

Since many small manufacturers are reluctant to deal with these questions, helping them do so is a high-priority opportunity for the MEP system.

Each MEP should consider meeting with its small manufacturers on a regular basis to explore the opportunities and challenges of growing their businesses and perhaps changing their business models.

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