## Psst...Printers' Secret Worries Me

**BYLINE:** By Kevin Cooper

**SECTION:** COLUMNS; BestTrack; Pg. 32

**LENGTH:** 493  words

Improving your print business shouldn't take any guesswork and certainly shouldn't be a secret. A great way to find ways to improve the bottom line and learn what others are doing is to attend a conference along with your fellow printers.

In January (the 16th-18th), the Research & Engineering Council of NAPL will host its Digital Smart Factory Forum in Orlando (www.napl.org). Here, printers can discover how innovators manage job components and manufacturing islands of automation-and schedule work so it speeds through the plant.

This spring, I spent three days in Arizona at the PIA/GTF Continuous Improvement Network conference and was impressed with what is taking place at a few printers in the industry. This conference is focused on the efforts printers are making to drive cost out of their business models through lean manufacturing and, to a smaller extent, Six Sigma principles.

Several printers shared case studies highlighting the success they've achieved, and many spirited conversations took place with good information and ideas exchanged. No one gave away any proprietary secrets or competitive information, and learning opportunities presented themselves at every session.

From my perspective, printers in attendance could be placed into three categories: 1) those who have embraced lean and are showing improvements of substance through their lean efforts; 2) those who came to learn about lean and how to apply it in their business; and 3) those printers who think they're implementing lean principles but, on closer examination, seem firmly entrenched in traditional paradigms around manufacturing improvement methods. One worrisome part of the whole experience is that this third group appears to be the largest in numbers in our industry.

Lean manufacturing is deceptively simple in concept. A commonly repeated theme at the conference was to not confuse simplicity with ease of implementation. If lean principles were easy to implement, many more firms would be on the path.

Lean principles identify and drive out waste, but defining waste is not limited to traditional thoughts regarding spoilage. Rather, waste includes wasted motion, production of product before or in excess of what a customer orders, creation and management of inventory, delays in production, and poorly designed and inefficient processes.

Fundamental to success is building a culture of empowerment, as lean initiatives are driven from the bottom up in organizations. Equally fundamental is embracing the concept of 5S: sort, straighten, sweep, standardize and sustain these improvements in your business. Frequently, it is in these two foundational areas that printers fail to spend the necessary effort to ensure lean success.

Success in lean drives costs out of your business, allowing you to earn higher profits or compete at lower prices. It focuses on your customers' needs. Do you want to know a secret? Lean principles apply to any business-especially yours.

**LOAD-DATE:** December 5, 2006

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Magazine