

## Turn Your Website into a Powerful Marketing Tool

BY BRAD F. KUVIN, EDITOR

...that not only invites prospective customers to learn more about your capabilities and strengths, but also convinces them that an onsite visit is a must. After that, let the revenue build.

When Virgil DeLay, president of Chicagoland metalforming company The Diemasters Manufacturing Inc., sat down a couple of years ago to begin in earnest a website redesign, he never envisioned becoming so passionate about the site's direction and content as he eventually did. The goal of the redesign was to focus on marketing the company's unique areas of expertise.

"Our existing website at the time," DeLay says, "looked like that of every other stamper. We displayed parts we made, and explained the manufacturing processes we were using. But from a true marketing perspective, we did not differentiate ourselves. We didn't touch on our niches, nor did we do a good job explaining why we're better at some types of work than at others."

"Early in the redesign process, working with a website-development vendor, I was skeptical that we'd be able to develop a new approach that would make a difference and generate leads that would turn into real revenue," DeLay shares. "So, I decided to manage and champion the redesign process myself, rather than delegate it, so that if it failed I'd fully understand why."

Today, nearly two years after that first brainstorming session, DeLay has no such concerns. The firm's new site is a clear revenue generator, and DeLay took some time to explain to me exactly how it works.

### All Metalformers are Not the Same

While a lot of stampers can make the same parts, to the same delivery schedule, at the same level of quality and for relatively the same price, why is it that some companies out-earn others, grow and prosper, while some struggle or disappear altogether? That's precisely the question DeLay and the development team he formed pondered when it began conceiving the new site, working with local developer Killian Branding.

"Everyone makes a cool part or two and is proud of its processes," DeLay says. "And after we began thinking of our cool parts and processes, I looked at dozens of other metalforming-company websites and I couldn't identify anything that we brought up that I didn't see on those other sites."

Becoming skeptical that a new website design would help differentiate The Diemasters in the marketplace, DeLay and his project team then set out to answer a more deeply thought-provoking question:

"What are we doing (right) that has allowed us to survive and thrive, while other companies around us have failed?"

Answering that question honestly and openly led to a discussion of the most proprietary and “secretive” processes that the company had developed over years and years of process-management focus. “We talked about our system and the special things we do to keep inventories down, which keeps capital in the company,” DeLay says. “We came up with about ten core competencies in all, most of them related to lean processes, which contribute to our success formula.”

Now we’re getting somewhere, the folks at Killian said, and were prepared to dive into site development based on The Diemasters’ once-guarded proprietary strategies.

“Opening the door to our proprietary processes might seem risky,” says DeLay, “but we know from experience that just because someone learns how we do things doesn’t mean they can easily copy what we’ve done and implement it in their own shop. It’s easy to buy new equipment, but not so easy to reengineer a process.”

### **The Proprietary Product Flow Process**

What was proprietary and is no longer? For starters, visit the website ([www.thediemasters.com](http://www.thediemasters.com)) and link to the product flow system (see photo). The Diemasters says that it designed its proprietary product-flow system to ensure everything moves through the plant as efficiently as possible, in line with the Theory of Constraints. The system proves to prospects that “we can stop on a dime if there is a change in product design, or if order volumes suddenly drop off,” says DeLay. “Customers want to know that if they call tomorrow and stop production, that we can quickly stop and, at the same time, limit their liability. Then they want to know how quickly we can get back up to speed when we need to.

“We used to hold that process very close to the vest,” DeLay adds, “but now realize what a huge mistake that was. Putting it out there on our website has helped the new site gain traction and has raised our search score. We find that as more and more OEMs are looking to dual-source their critical products, they’re considering only the top 10 or so companies that might come up on an Internet search.”

### **Earning High Scores**

Thanks to the thorough approach The Diemasters took with its new website--in the product flow area and others--it’s consistently appearing in the top 10 sites of companies of interest. And DeLay is finding that OEMs typically will ask to visit only three to five those top 10. Since launching the new website, DeLay definitely notices an increase in the number of visits from prospects.

“Once we get prospects into our plant,” adds DeLay, “the conversion rate is high.” For example, DeLay describes a new account landed last July specifically due to the supercharged website.

“The strength of the new content added to the site drew them to the site and led to a visit to our facility,” says DeLay. “After they witnessed in person what they viewed on the site, they decided to source a major assembly with us.

“One of the primary goals we established when deciding to invest in the website was to use it to open the door to more complex assembly work for our customers, and that’s exactly what this new project

comprises,” continues DeLay. The new customer has The Diemasters manufacturing parts for, and assembling, a complex electrical assembly that DeLay expects will lead to success with similar new accounts.

### **Attracting the “Right Prospects”**

There are plenty of other information-packed tabs on the website, including several minutes of narrated video sequences providing up-close looks at the technology being used throughout the facility. What caught our eye was how short (and sweet) the Request for Quote (RFQ) section is—“designed that way on purpose,” notes DeLay. He notes that the goal was to provoke website visitors to “give us a call and ask to schedule an onsite visit, rather than spend a lot of time preparing an online RFQ.” Also missing from the RFQ area (by design) is the ability to upload a drawing with an RFQ.

“We have found that when companies attach parts drawings, we often have several questions and may wind up going in a wrong direction,” says DeLay. “So we designed the RFQ area to encourage companies to reach out to us so that we can discuss project details in a more direct way.

“And,” he adds, “we also want to avoid prospects looking to treat suppliers as commodity stampers—those OEMs that tend to blast their projects and parts drawings to every stamper with an online RFQ form.”

### **Last but Not Least—Selecting the Right Technology Partner**

Just how did DeLay and his team go about selecting a technology partner with whom it could work to develop a website different than that from most other metalformers? For starters, since search-engine optimization and search score was so critical, DeLay only considered website-development companies whose own websites scored high on search engines. The thought was that if a company couldn’t drive its own search score high, it likely would struggle to deliver the results The Diemasters expected.

The team also sought a “good-old-fashioned advertising company” that had expanded into website design and web-based marketing, rather than hiring a relatively new company specializing only in website design that otherwise lacked a solid background in business-to-business marketing.

A third qualifier, explains DeLay: “I did not want to hire a website developer that already had created a site for a metalforming company, because I did not want just another run-of-the-mill contract-manufacturing website. I wanted a fresh perspective.” Those three qualifiers flushed out the potential list of partner candidates to just three local companies, including Killian Branding.

Now that the site has become so successful, is DeLay worried that his competitors will imitate what he’s done—with his website and with his company?

“As long as we don’t stop innovating, we’ll stay ahead...by several steps,” he boasts. MF