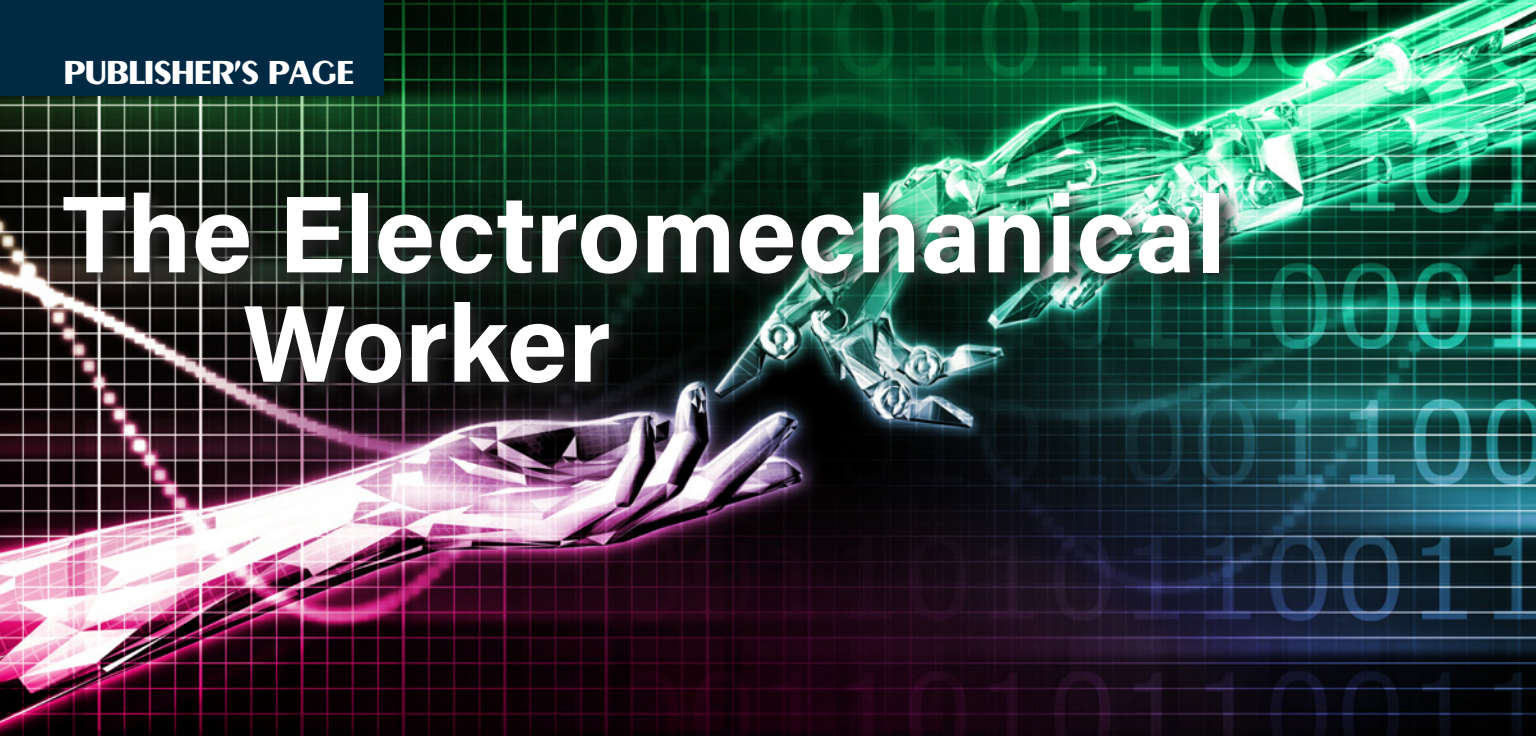


The Electromechanical Worker



At the AGMA/ABMA annual meeting (held March 15–17 in Napa, CA), gear manufacturers, bearing manufacturers and industry suppliers spent a lot of time talking about one of the key issues affecting all of industry: finding and retaining skilled employees.

I hear about a lot of different approaches people are taking, including cooperations with local educational institutions, such as high schools, community colleges and technical trade schools. I heard the competition for dedicated young employees who are interested in joining a manufacturing team is so fierce that many companies who want to hire simply can't. Some have even begun creating their own in-house training and education programs at least partially in order to bypass that competition and find and develop the necessary talent.

Almost everyone I talked to said they would hire more people if they could. Even at a time when industry growth has stalled or even ground to a halt, nobody is talking about layoffs, closures or shutdowns. Everybody is hiring, or at least trying to do so.

It's no surprise, then, that interest in robotics and automation is skyrocketing. By automating processes, you can maintain or increase your levels of productivity without adding labor.

This issue, many of our articles touch on this theme.

For example, the article "Easy Integration" (p. 16) talks about how smart couplings and brakes from Mayr help enhance the safety of cobots and other lightweight robots.

We also have a great feature article (p. 20) from Ready Robotics and Master Power Transmission about how robotics can be effectively introduced, even in a low-volume, high-mix environment, to enhance efficiency, optimize labor and promote sustainable practices.

Finally, Senior Editor Matt Jaster gives us a preview of the upcoming Automate 2024 trade show with his article,

"The Flexible Factory," where he covers mobile robots, cobots, artificial intelligence and many other technologies that will be on display when the event comes to McCormick Place in Chicago, May 6–9.

Automation won't solve all of industry's skilled labor issues. No matter how much you're able to automate, you're still going to need skilled people to operate the technology you've implemented. Unfortunately, finding and retaining those skilled people doesn't seem like it's going to become easier any time soon.

But implementing technology has always been a key to improving productivity, efficiency, quality and safety, and doing those things are the hallmarks of remaining competitive. So it behooves every manufacturer to continue the process of improving operations. Clearly, automation has to be a big part of the solution.

I'm interested to know what the rest of you are doing in your industries to increase automation. Are your efforts paying off? Are they relieving the pressure of not having enough skilled workers? How much more can you automate, and what have you tried so far?

Drop me a line at stott@agma.org. I'd love to hear about your experiences with implementing automation and robotics, and to learn more about your challenges and success stories.

PTE

Handwritten signature of Randy Stott in black ink.

Randy Stott

Publisher & Editor-in-Chief

