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# PURSuing PERFECTION

TOOLS, IDEAS,  
AND SOLUTIONS  
FOR CONTINUOUS  
IMPROVEMENT

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## Business Essentials: Get Yourself to the Gemba!

by Fred Heintz, CPIM CIRM

**Is your management style “under cover”? Maybe it’s time for you to go where it all happens — and to do it more often.**

It seems amazing that the television show “Undercover Boss” is on the air. Not because it doesn’t deliver some entertainment, but it’s amazing any “C” level executive would be willing to admit they know so little about how his or her company operates. The CEO of Hooters is surprised when

what employees do and how the company operates on a day-to-day basis. It is unseemly that an executive can have no idea about the conditions under which they expect their workers to live.

The other point is how they can so easily go “undercover.” This says they are totally unfamiliar to the people who work for them. In most small companies, this would be impossible. While a CEO of a large multi-national firm might not be able to visit every location, if a corporation has fewer than ten locations, each location should have seen the CEO

during the last year.



This brings us to the concept of “Gemba.” Gemba means “place where it happens” in Japanese. In Lean, going to the Gemba means going to the factory floor where the items are produced. Any corporation where Lean is part of the culture could never have a boss go undercover. The workers should be so familiar with senior management that they could never

woman he talks to finds the whole restaurant concept demeaning? Has he never talked to anyone besides Hooters’ Vice Presidents about Hooters?

sneak into the workplace unnoticed.

While we wouldn’t expect the owner of a large corporation to have worked at every role in the company, he or she should have a working knowledge of

Going to the Gemba is not just taking a quick walking tour. It implies management is not just trying to see what is happening, but also listening to the

## OUR MISSION

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workers and trying to help improve what is happening. We have worked at companies where a visit by the CEO or COO is preceded by a week of cleaning and polishing, followed by a smooth fawning executive tour. Again, this is not going to the Gemba.

At smaller, younger firms, sometimes the opposite problem occurs. It is almost impossible to get the boss off the floor. While Lean normally defines going to the Gemba

as visiting the factory floor, remember the Japanese definition of Gemba. Things also happen in the office, and it is important that the boss be as familiar with this area. While it is not often apparent, especially if the office hasn't been Leaned with visual signals, man-

agement needs to listen when visiting to determine if there are problems in the office.

Listening doesn't mean just hearing the workers complain, because often in the worst situations there won't be any complaints.

Management needs to listen to what is happening. On the factory floor, it is easy to hear if equipment is or isn't running. In the office, management needs to listen to find

out if people are working together. Is there talking among people? Are they working as a team?

Is there smiling and laughter? These clues are important when determining if the office process is working well.

It is important for management to know what is happening in the day-to-day business of

the company; however, going "undercover" is not the best way to do it. While we all might enjoy watching British Petroleum CEO Tony Hayward working on an unsafe oil rig, this is not the best way for management to know and improve the business. Going to the Gemba allows management to stay in contact with the business without spending all their time in the day-to-day business. Remember, it is senior management's job to lead the company into the vision of where it will be in the next five to ten years.

Do you need advice on how to best utilize the Gemba concept in your Lean operation? Sixth Floor Consulting Group can help your company "Go to the Gemba" with best practices and other management techniques to improve your operation. Contact us at our website [here](#), and we'll show you how we can assist you. ■

**"It is important for management to know what is happening ... however, going 'undercover' is not the best way to do it."**



## Mark your calendar ...

Date	Event
August 9	Excel 2007: a. 4-hour Excel 150 (Basics) b. 4-hour Excel 201 (Intermediate)
August 20	Excel 2003: a. 4-hour Excel 150 (Basics) b. 4-hour Excel 201 (Intermediate)
August 30	Excel 2007: a. 4-hour Excel 150 (Basics) b. 4-hour Excel 201 (Intermediate)

Call us or visit our [website](#) for event and registration details

# Three Obstacles That Keep Manufacturers Off the Web

by Cheryl Rice

Even in 2010, many manufacturers still struggle with utilizing the web as a marketing tool. It's a paradox, because in virtually every other aspect of their operations, manufacturers must stay on the leading edge of technology in order to remain competitive. But, when it comes to lead generation and marketing communications, many decision-makers find themselves depending on traditional channels like direct mail, print advertising, and trade shows. It's not that those channels are no longer effective; depending on the business, traditional channels can still play a very important role in reaching target customers. But the level of discomfort with online marketing is still so high that many manufacturers neglect it entirely, and that's leaving them at a distinct disadvantage.

In my experience, three obstacles seem to make many manufacturers reluctant to pursue web marketing:

First of all, some manufacturers still hold onto the belief that **their customer base is not active online**. True, some customers are more immersed in online sourcing and purchasing than others, but in 2010, we've gotten to the point that it's as much an issue of simple demographics as anything else. If a good chunk of your target market is age 35 or under, they hardly know a world without the web. They reach for a

computer the way previous generations reached for a phone book. Don't make the mistake of thinking your target customers don't work at a desk or are too "blue collar" to use the internet to research potential purchases. With each passing year, that becomes less and less true.

Second, **manufacturers are not in the business of creating "information."** Manufacturers make stuff — tangible products — but, on the web, the currency is content. It's a struggle to create (and to keep creating) the kind of content that will enhance your brand, position you as an industry leader, and attract potential customers, but this is where the real opportunity lies. If you can give someone the information they need specifically when they need it (i.e. when they sit down to do a search), you become the solution to their problem. You're building trust in your business right out of the gate, with someone who is actively interested in buying what you sell.

Third, **it's just too far outside their comfort zone**. Most marketing decision-makers in the manufacturing sector have been in the field for a number of years, many of them in sales. They "get" trade shows, industry publications, and even cold-calling. But communicating to potential customers via the web is an entirely different animal. They fear doing it wrong, or paying too much, or



maybe they just don't understand the process. While fear of the unknown is understandable, there are resources available to help you learn more about the basics of web marketing so you don't feel quite so vulnerable. And, yes, a trusted adviser can help you make the leap while avoiding the pitfalls.

Your customers are moving to the web. Really. They are using search engines to source and research suppliers, and many of them are also active in social media, recommending products and services to colleagues. Maintaining a web presence with updated content and other relevant information isn't easy, but it's quickly becoming the most basic of marketing tactics. In 2010, sales success is less about seeking customers and more about being sought by them. You just need to be there when they are looking. ■

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