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# Turning 30 Offers Perspective

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The founder of Absolute Machine Tools reflects in his 30 years at the helm of his company.

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Our company, Absolute Machine Tools Inc., is marking its 30<sup>th</sup> year as a machine tool importer and distributor in North America. It certainly doesn't seem like 30 years have passed since we started the company in half of a garage in 1988. I can remember those years like it was last week.

On the other hand, when considering how manufacturing technology has changed since then and how we sell and support that technology has evolved, it seems like eons ago. After all, CNC machine tools, digital readouts and the like were just starting to emerge in the marketplace in the late 80s. In fact, my first job after college was selling Anilam digital readouts.

Through Anilam, I was put in touch with Johnford, a machine tool builder in Taiwan, and suddenly my friend, Hayden Wellman, and I were in the machine tool business with a line of machining centers to sell and support. I quickly had to learn all there was to know about importing, sending documents on a thermal paper rotating drum facsimile machine and making an international phone call. It was all new to me with a steep learning curve.

In short order, we were able to move out of the garage and kept adding lines year after year.

We established headquarters in Lorain, Ohio. Courtney, my wife, gave up a Fortune 500 corporate marketing job to join me in the business and apply her marketing skills to our growing firm. Johnford was followed by partnerships with You Ji for vertical machines and Tongtai (formerly Hitachi Seiki) for drill tap machines, turning centers and high speed machining centers. Next came our relationships with Nexturn for Swiss-type lathes, QuickTech for mill-turn centers and Precihole for gundrilling machines.

In 2009, we acquired a company in Mason, Ohio, (just north of Cincinnati) and with it came AccuteX line of Wire EDM equipment. In 2011, we purchased our Mason facility outright. In 2013, we opened a technical center in Elgin, Illinois. At that time,

**we achieved authorized integrator status with FANUC Robotics America. Just last year, we acquired Advanced Machinery Systems, thereby becoming the exclusive importer/distributor of Lico CNC screw machines for turning complex small parts.**

**Between our locations in Ohio, Michigan and Illinois and our distributor network, Absolute now spans the contiguous U.S., Canada and Mexico.**

**As our lines started to gel, a clearer picture of what our company was all about came into focus and that is what Absolute Machine Tools represents. I believe it is summed up by dedication to our customers and our ability to service them with engineering services, maintenance and spare parts.**

**It's in the area of providing engineering services where I believe our company has changed the most over the years, as the technology and solutions have increased in complexity and automation. Other full-service distributors would concur, I'm sure. Buying a machine tool years ago was almost like buying a car – it was a stand-alone unit to add capability to a milling or turning department in a factory. Now, there is often applications engineering support required for even a one-off machine and certainly for complete turnkey cells and systems for a certain part or family of parts. Often future flexibility needs to be considered and built-in to the solution as well. There's much more emphasis on designing and configuring profitable solutions that can grow modularly with a company's needs. Providing such services to Absolute's core customers is critical when manufacturing trends such as Industry 4.0 and other emerging technologies are difficult for job shops to implement. We're not seeing a lot of full factory digitization yet with the smaller shops—they have so much on their plates. However, the OEMs and top tier suppliers are definitely moving in that direction.**

**Like every company in the manufacturing sector, we are concerned about the lack of skilled labor available to hire. Ten years ago, we began to develop our own talent by hiring promising young people and training them. We also have a relationship with both our local Lorain County Joint Vocational School (LCJVS) and Lorain County Community College's Manufacturing Engineering Technology associate's degree program. We've hired people who have completed their programs and currently have two high school interns from LCJVS.**

**Owning a machine tool business for 30 years has been both challenging and rewarding. We keep striving every day to provide advanced technology and valuable services to our customers and by doing that well, we can insure security for our employees. I can't wait to see what our business will look like 30 years from now.**

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