

THE POWER OF THE CONSUMER

by Gary Bryant, Senior Vice President and National Sales Manager



Business and industry often undergo dramatic changes due to market forces unforeseen by the business leaders of the day. An example is the Wabash and Erie Canal. In the 1840s, the canal system never saw completion because of a “new” technology, the railroads. During the 1970s, IBM was the recognized leader of the computer industry. A powerful global business, IBM misjudged the importance of software and focused their attention on hardware. Bill Gates started Microsoft in his garage and in less than thirty years it is one of the largest companies in the world, surpassing IBM. These are but a few of the lessons that remind me to keep a watchful eye for the stimulus of dramatic change within our industry.

Today, one trend warrants attention - America’s ability to absorb so much of the world’s manufacturing production. The United States is acknowledged as the leader in the global economy. Every developing country wants to import its goods to the United States because we are the number one consumer market in the world. But the flood of imported products has had a negative impact on U.S. manufacturing jobs, and few regions of the country have seen this impact more so than here in the Midwest. The debate regarding the attack on America’s manufacturing base is very complicated. Should we impose quotas or tariffs in order to protect jobs? Tariffs, set by our legislators, generally help one segment of an industry at the expense of another. The opposing point-of-view in this debate is that our economy benefits from lower cost imported goods. Making products more affordable provides a higher standard of living for everyone. Both viewpoints of this issue have merit, but I don’t believe our legislators will be the ones to decide this debate. The consumer will ultimately make the decision. In our society, the consumer is the driving force behind our economy, past, present, and future.

I was sharing my concerns with a customer recently. This person had witnessed firsthand the changes imports have had on the U.S. steel industries, and he pointed out that the companies that embraced change and were swift to evolve are still in business and prospering. I happen to agree with his optimistic viewpoint on this matter. America leads the world in innovation, and I believe we’ll evolve to endure this impetus of change as well. Where the consumer leads it’s wise for the smart businessman to follow.

