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Q & A with Jim Foster, President and Founder, DesignSource Technology

IEN: *What are the major concerns facing the design/OEM sector in the next few years?*

Foster: There are increasing pressures on the design sector to communicate detailed design information within the design group and other parts of the organization more quickly and efficiently. The benefits are clear: faster approvals, more streamlined design processes, faster turnaround, more accurate cost forecasting, higher quality, and greater efficiencies in the manufacturing process.

IEN: *How is the design process being incorporated throughout the industrial enterprise?*

Foster: The design process is expanded throughout the enterprise via better communication. This can mean a number of things, from a faster network to software solutions that facilitate interaction between people that need to be more involved. The majority of software tools that integrate design information into the enterprise are still expensive, complex, and very resource consuming to implement. These communication tools all too often place an additional burden on designers by taking away time from the design process and imposing additional administrative processes that take considerable time and effort. I haven't met a lot of designers who aspire to become "product data experts," so that's why DesignSource has focused on developing a product data management tool that is intuitive in the design process and offers the ability to manage and communicate design information within the design group and to the enterprise.

IEN: *What innovations are in store for users?*

Foster: Tools for communicating design information will continue to improve, based on user demands. Primarily, there is going to be a continued push toward some type of homogeneous design information and management standards that make it easier for people to work with, manage, and communicate design information. This will eventually be done without imposing an additional burden on design engineers. This will mean, among other things, greater interoperability between CAD software packages and PDM software packages.

IEN: *How are software, equipment, and materials being integrated in today's design world?*

Foster: In the past 20 years, there has been a huge cost associated with trying a new design technology. It not only required a substantial investment in hardware, it also necessitated huge investments in CAD, PDM, and virtually any kind of software.

Today, software applications associated to the design environment are available on PCs, and in general, at a much lower cost. This opens the door to more opportunities for companies to try out new technologies. For under $10,000, a company can now implement a CAD software package with sophisticated product data management capabilities that can be easily integrated to communicate with other enterprise systems such as ERP. In most cases, companies can experience a rapid return-on-investment.

IEN: *What is design's role in the lean/flexible enterprise?*

Foster: In a lean enterprise, there is a higher reliance to share design processes and associated information with other groups and/or departments throughout the enterprise. For example, information generated by the CAD software can easily be programmed to automatically produce a bill of material, which is then shared among manufacturing, purchasing, accounting and other relevant areas. This can speed up many of the related business and production processes such as ordering and billing, while eliminating the need for human intervention.

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