

Q&A: Getting Quality Back

Once upon a time the term “Made in America” stood for something: pride, jobs, and quality. However, we have become a society of increasing consumer demand, which led to a notable decrease in quality at manufacturers worldwide. *IMPO* sat down with [Dyadem](#) [1] president and CEO Kevin North for a look at what manufacturers can do to improve quality while remaining cost efficient. Dyadem has been addressing manufacturing quality for years with comprehensive risk management software, which has been implemented in many Global 1000 companies.



Dyadem president and CEO Kevin North

IMPO: Why have manufacturers let their quality slip?

North: It is not that manufacturers have disregarded quality; no customer we’ve ever dealt with did not care about quality. But in the last 30 years there have been many variables that have influenced business, and can help explain why quality has slipped across industries. One variable is the complexity of manufacturing — more complex parts are being built — and in turn you have more complex manufacturing processes to make more complex products. Another is that there is more reliance on third parties - outsourcing and global supply chains. That, of course, will increase the variables in the process, and places where control can be lost.

There definitely are cost pressures, too. There’s not a manufacturer that will say,

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“Let’s increase our production costs.” That’s not going to happen. Tech consumers are also cost-conscious, and, to some extent, I think that quality has become less important to consumers than it was 30, 40 years ago, and manufacturers have adjusted based on the consumers’ value systems.

Look on a decade-by-decade basis for the last 30 years. The pure innovation in technology has been overwhelming. But where has the innovation been in quality? There’s been some systems put in place, but there’s nowhere near the amount of innovation in quality as the amount of innovation in technology. It’s not a conscious effort to save money — you have a lot of variables, and things have definitely slipped across a lot of industries.

What are some of the technologies that manufacturers can implement on the plant floor?

North: Our solution is truly an innovation in quality. Prior to Dyadem’s systems, the best a manufacturer could get was a Quality Management System (QMS). Shop floor manufacturing really is about “find-and-fix” when you have an issue. That’s really not an innovative technology — to me, that’s more about behaving reactively instead of proactively. Case in point: I think the QMS market is suffering quite a bit, and we’re selling into companies that already have a QMS in place. There’s no “magic bullet” that Quality Management Systems are offering.

I talked to a journalist who worked in manufacturing 30 years ago. He was telling me about the issues in manufacturing that they had, really around the non-collaboration and lack of sharing between the design and manufacturing groups. I said to him, “What if I told you now that things are just as bad? That you don’t have sharing of information between people that are designing and manufacturing products.” You can’t necessarily blame the companies, because they didn’t really have a good system in place for sharing that information.

Eighty percent of issues in manufacturing are actually repeat issues. Consumers wouldn’t think that — they would think that most problems are with new products and new innovation, to get the kinks out — but most of the issues are repeat issues. What does that tell you? It tells you that manufacturers are not learning from their mistakes.

I don’t want to point the blame at manufacturers, because I see manufacturers as struggling with this issue. They’re trying to do the right thing, and they’re trying to put systems in place. They really need a way to take their corrective actions — all the things they’ve done to mitigate a risk or correct an issue — and bring that back into a “lessons learned” database so the entire company is on the same page.

Unfortunately, and I wish I could say something different, we have a lot of customers across the board, where the customer is coming to us and seeking us only after they’ve had a serious issue, with a serious recall, and there’s extreme executive pressure to get their act together. It’s that kind of reactive mechanism, that straw that broke the camel’s back, that forces a manufacturer to change its entire quality processes across the globe.

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Is the pressure to be first to market hurting the quality for some manufacturers? What should manufacturers be doing differently to strengthen their marketshare while still producing quality goods?

North: Being first to market does not imply that you're going to have quality issues. In fairness, there are companies that are doing a good job at managing quality. They've put in very strict systems, and they've got their act together. That's probably the exception to the norm, but to say that companies are having quality issues solely because they're trying to be first to market is false. I think it goes back to my earlier statement where actually most of the issues are repeat issues in manufacturing.

If you've got that global system for risk in place — all of your lessons learned between design and manufacturing — by definition we believe a manufacturer will be able to get to market quicker because they will spend less time dealing with quality issues. They will spend less time retooling and dealing with manufacturing issues, stoppage, and redesign. We strongly believe they will get to market sooner because they will spend less time on not only quality issues, but also the normal quality processes that manufacturers are undergoing.

There are a number of big companies who have had products recalled recently. Is product design to blame, manufacturing, or the bridge between the two?

North: There's no way that you can say it's one group or the other that's causing problems. More often than not, I think it's the lack of collaboration, the lack of sharing. Sometimes, manufacturers are playing Russian roulette. We've had situations, for example, in the pharmaceutical industry, where they've had an issue, and that issue could have happened five years ago. But by a stroke of luck, something happened, and it was that incident that made them dig deep and find a much greater problem. And it was only by sheer luck that it didn't happen earlier, and it didn't happen more often.

That bridge is really critical. How do you actually make sure that an issue 30 years ago is not causing new problems, in light of all those variables? How can we be sure we've got something that mitigates those variables and at least give us a fighting chance at producing quality products? We're about "learn and prevent." It's a different psychology. And that comes with linking design and manufacturing, and linking field issues with design.

So do you see a big difference between simply hiring another quality control engineer, as opposed to incorporating risk management software?

North: Absolutely. I think throwing bodies at this kind of problem is completely meaningless. If you don't have the right communication, and you don't have the right nomenclature, and the right systems in place, then putting in bodies is not going to do anything. You could throw a hundred bodies at it — it's not going to make a difference. If you're calling a problem a "red fruit" and I'm calling it an

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“apple,” we’re not on the same page. There’s too much possibility for misinterpretation. It’s the same problem, but we think it’s two different issues.

I’ve dealt with customers that have stopped production processes for months just to retool, to be able to get things exactly right. Can you imagine how much money they lost in that process, to shut down production processes for that kind of thing? It’s a huge problem. Throwing quality engineers at this isn’t going to work when you don’t have the right systems in place.

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