

Chuck Prussack

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Innovation propels market

Innovation, the subject of this issue of *PCI Journal*, is an interesting topic. The word can be defined many ways, even within the context of prestressed concrete. I think the concept to many people is based on a perception; for example, Apple is perceived as being an innovative company because it is continually rolling out ever neater phones, computers, and gadgets. Innovation can also be applied to manufacturing an existing product more efficiently or better. As discussed at the CEO Summit a year ago, innovation, along with marketing and people, is a high priority for PCI and its members. To me, this means not only do we need to improve on anticipating what the marketplace wants but also figuring out how to do things better within our plants.

The marketplace loves newness. Some of our bridge products are indeed new. For example, curved girders bring a new tool to the marketplace so owners have a choice between steel and concrete in an area formerly dominated by steel. For substructures, an area traditionally dominated by cast-in-place concrete, there is now a choice between cast-in-place and precast concrete, which can accelerate construction schedules. Spliced or segmental girders can extend spans that were previously only built of steel. The use of ultra-high-performance concrete to tie pieces of precast concrete together to act as if they were monolithic can shorten the construction process dramatically, along with other accelerated bridge construction techniques. In the Northwest, where most bridges are precast concrete, product innovation is doing OK, but we need to continually look to our plants to more efficiently make bridge products.

Where I think we need more work is in the building arena. The engineers and architects I talk to see precast concrete as just another potential system that is "too heavy," "not new," and "not as friendly to trades as other systems." Can we meet these challenges with our existing products, or do we need a new approach? Could we build existing products more efficiently, so as to be perceived as the lowest-cost option? Do we need to look for a game-changing system, as opposed to what we do now? I don't have the answers, but I can assure you that PCI is working on it. A consultant has presented to a PCI Task Group the results of phase 1 of a study to identify the best areas for precast concrete market growth. This is important in that if effort is going to be put into this task, there will be more work in our plants as a reward! Phase 2 will pick up where phase 1 left off and will identify specifically what we can do to better penetrate the marketplace. I'll be watching as closely as you for their conclusions about what we can do to be more innovative! At Oldcastle we continually look for ways to build what we build more efficiently already, but who knows what new lean approaches may come to light. [▶](#)



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