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Don't Wait ... Automate!

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By Jeff Burnstein, President, Association for Advancing Automation (A3)

A3, the umbrella organization for tech-focused trade associations RIA, AIA, and MCA, serves as the voice for the need to automate.

Recently, there has been a large amount of media coverage on the issue of automation technologies taking jobs, especially in manufacturing. The CBS News program *60 Minutes* aired a segment in January highlighting the automation industry, titled “March of the Machines.” Though we appreciated the focus on how technological advances in automation and robotics are revolutionizing the workplace, we were very disappointed in how they characterized the segment as “robots taking jobs” in America. In fact, we distributed a press release the next day expressing our criticism of the segment.

60 Minutes had the opportunity to highlight why innovative American companies are using automation to become stronger global competitors, saving and creating more jobs while producing higher quality and lower cost products, rather than closing up shop or shipping jobs overseas. Unfortunately they chose not to focus on this.

“To paint advances in technology as just taking jobs is very one-sided,” stated Dr. Henrik Christensen, KUKA Chair of Robotics & Director of Robotics, Georgia Institute of Technology and member of the Board of Directors of RIA. “Studies have shown that 1.3 better, higher paying jobs are created in associated areas for every one job that may be insourced. In fact, the larger issue is companies are having trouble finding qualified employees to fill these high tech job openings. We instead should focus on how best to educate our workforce in the United States so that we can remain the leader in automation technologies.”

Manufacturers Speak Up For Automation

Medium and small companies are the engine of job creation in the U.S. Many of these companies are utilizing the advantages of [automation to save and create more jobs](#). Examples of this

include [wire forms](#) and [custom stainless product manufacturer Marlin Steel](#), and precision machining and fabrication company, Vickers Engineering.

“[Automation creates jobs](#) in the United States,” said Drew Greenblatt, President and Owner of Marlin Steel. “Marlin Steel is hiring people because [our robots make us more productive](#), so we are price competitive with China. Our quality is consistent and superior, and we ship much faster. Our mechanical engineers can design [material handling baskets](#) more creatively since we can make more precise parts. Our employees have gone 1,492 days without a safety incident because robots can do the more difficult jobs while our employees can focus on growing the business. American manufacturing’s embrace of robotics will ensure a new manufacturing renaissance in this country.”

Adds Vickers Engineering president, Matt Tyler, “Roughly 90 percent of our automated cells are producing parts that were previously made off shore, while the other ten percent were also globally competitive, strictly due to automation. Automation has not only allowed us to bring more jobs back to the United States due to our ‘new’ cost structure, but our profit margin has increased. This ultimately allows us to fund additional growth, which in turn creates more stateside jobs.”

A3's Automation Commitment

A3 is an umbrella organization for three trade associations:

- Robotic Industries Association (RIA), which is dedicated to improving the regional, national, and global competitiveness of the North American manufacturing and service sectors through promotion and enhancement of robotics and related information.
- AIA - Advancing Vision + Imaging, whose mission is to advance the understanding and use of vision and imaging technologies to drive global expansion and growth through education and promotion.
- Motion Control Association (MCA), which is dedicated to promoting the understanding and use of motion control technologies and developing opportunities for motion control companies.

While A3 serves as the voice for the need to automate, RIA, AIA and MCA focus on how companies and organizations specifically can apply robots, vision, and motion control. Our strategy is to engage stakeholders from around the world and demonstrate why automation technologies can change the way products are manufactured today, and into the future.

Together, A3 represents some 650 global member companies that drive automation forward. These companies include automation manufacturers, component suppliers, system integrators, end users, research groups, and consulting firms from throughout the world.

One of our biggest opportunities is to educate small-to-medium sized companies that they too, like [Marlin Steel](#) and Vickers Engineering, can utilize automation technologies to enhance and grow their business. We recently launched our initial website,

www.a3automate.org, which in the future will be the place to go for information on “why” companies should automate. This will include video testimonials, white papers, statistics, and articles focusing on why automating is beneficial. Our individual association websites will continue to provide information on “how” companies can automate. (RIA – www.robotics.org; AIA – www.visiononline.org; MCA – www.motioncontrolonline.org)

As a trade association, we interact on a regular basis with people from our member organizations around the world, and are always coming up with new ways to serve them better. Three key events that A3 hosts include our biennial trade shows and annual business conference. Automate is the premier event for the automation industry, showcasing the full spectrum of automation technologies and solutions. The event was recently held in January, 2013 where more than 10,000 attendees came to Chicago to see these technologies in action from over 150 exhibitors. The next Automate will be held in March, 2015 in Chicago.

The Vision Show is North America’s largest display of machine vision and imaging technologies. The show provides vision users, system integrators, machine builders, and OEMs with access to exhibits from over 100 leading manufacturers, distributors, and suppliers from around the world. The next show will be held April 15-17, 2014 in Boston.

Finally, A3 hosts an annual collocated business and networking conference for automation industry leaders from around the world. The conference, attended by nearly 400 people, includes keynote and breakout sessions on emerging technologies and issues facing the automation industry, along with networking activities to help attendees make important business contacts. The next event will be held January 22-24, 2014 in Orlando.

For more information, please visit a3automate.org.

<http://www.mbtmag.com/articles/2013/07/don%E2%80%99t-wait-automate>

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