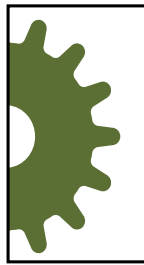




Sterling and Roland Ramberg



Q&A

Roland Ramberg

CEO

THE GEAR WORKS—SEATTLE, INC.


restructured while new ones emerge. In our case we were coming off a period of setting revenue records every year, and folding those profits back into the company, only to suddenly find ourselves with as much as a 30-percent reduction of orders from some industries. We're starting to see some improvement, however. While our traditional markets include mining, machine tools, oil and gas, refining, wood products, utilities, and aerospace, among others, we've seen a resurgence in our military orders lately, and we've also expanded our activities in the wind-energy market. Although we've offered wind turbine gearbox repair services for many years, we've really seen an increase in that area recently. That has to do with the fact that we're located in the Pacific Northwest, and so we're very close to some of the largest wind farms in the country, but it's also because we've built a reputation over the past six decades as a specialist in high-end gearing, gearbox assembly, and repair work. And that work is complemented by our Gearbox Repair and Test Facility, which is a 20,000 square-foot building with a gearbox test bed and 20-ton overhead cranes. I've just placed an order for a couple more cranes, in fact, so we're actively marketing ourselves in the wind industry, especially since more gearboxes will require repairs as the market matures and the equipment ages.

GS: As a gearing professional, how do you go about realizing the full potential of this growing market?

RR: One thing to keep in mind is that the turbines are so much larger than they were when we first got involved in the wind industry. At that time they were all kilowatt-class turbines, but now we're well into the megawatt range and getting bigger all the time.

It takes more space to service gearboxes of that size, of course, and more-powerful machining and material-handling equipment, but that's something we're looking into very closely. Like everybody else we'd like to see a very clear indication that the economy is really on the upswing before we make any more

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capital investments, but we already have the experience we need and we're ready to make that move as soon as we're convinced that it's time. We're always interested in growth, but the smart way to go about it is slowly and cautiously. That way you'll be around to enjoy it! 

GS: I see that you've launched a new Web site. It's very impressive.

RR: Thanks for paying us a visit. We decided that it was time to rebrand ourselves, so we invested in a new site that helps outline our capabilities along with a new logo and tagline, which is “Ingenuity in Motion.” We wanted it to be clean, professional, and to take advantage of all the latest Web technologies. For instance, we participate in Washington State's Shared Work Program, which enables workers with reduced hours during this economic downturn to receive unemployment benefits while also holding onto their pensions and health benefits. Not long ago NBC Nightly News filmed a segment at our facility, which Brian Williams presented on his newscast, and you can view the video by clicking on our “In the Works” link. There's also information there on our new Metallurgical Testing Center and our gearbox repair service, as well as announcements of equipment purchases, such as our new Hofler six-axis CNC gear hobber. In addition, we outline our capabilities in the areas of custom gears and gearboxes, planetary drives, and emergency repair services. So there's a lot of great information about what we can do for our customers there, and we plan to keep it current.

GS: Recent economic hardships have led many gear manufacturers to rethink the markets they serve. How have you approached this challenge?

RR: We're in the same boat everyone else has been in for the past year, watching old markets being

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