

FANUC'S Cicco Says Robots Are a Way To Bring Industry Jobs Back to U.S.

by Jim Stickford

The year 2012 was a good year for robotics companies, but as the Auburn Hills-based FANUC can attest, it's not just due to cars.

The Robotics Industry Association (RIA) trade group based out of Ann Arbor recently issued a report stating that 2012 was the best year for the North American robotics market.

RIA president Jeff Burnstein said that was due, in large part, to the automotive industry. When new models are introduced by OEMs, they tend to buy up a lot robotics systems, Burnstein said. And in the last couple of years, OEMs have introduced a lot of new models.

Good news for robotics manufacturers, Burnstein said, is that the OEMs aren't going to slow down on the introduction of new models anytime soon.

"The auto industry is the largest customer for robotics manufacturers," Burnstein said. "But that's not the only reason robotics manufacturers enjoyed a record year in 2012."

Industry is coming back to North America, Burnstein said. All things being nearly equal, companies have come to the realization that it's better to have manufacturing facilities close to the customer base. For example, color televisions are now being manufactured in Detroit under the brand name of "Element."

Burnstein said sales are up in other industries besides automotive. He cited the metalworking industries, life sciences and pharmaceuticals as industries that use robots in the manufacturing process and that have increased their orders for robots to meet rising demand.

"I think 2013 will continue the upward trend," Burnstein said. "I can't say that it will be a record, but I see the long-term trend as going up."

Another factor contributing to the trend, Burnstein said, is the size of the businesses automating. It wasn't too long ago that it was the large corporations that were buying robots. But now he's seeing medium and small companies automating.

He said that Marlin Steel, a company that started out making metal wire baskets for bagel shops as the perfect example of a small company automating and seeing its business not only survive but grow.

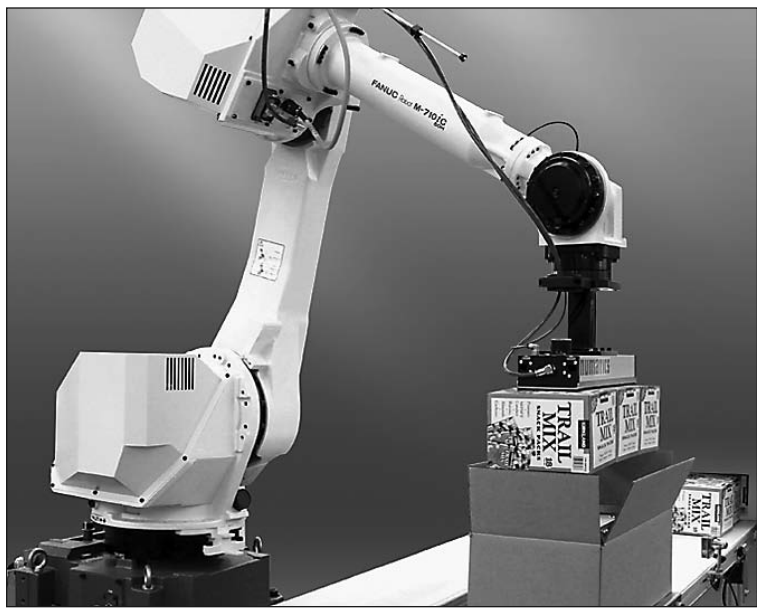
Burnstein said Marlin Steel was getting killed by Chinese imports. The company's president,

Drew Greenblatt, decided to automate. This allowed him to improve quality and increase the volume of production so the cost of an individual basket was now competitive with imports. Additionally, Burnstein said, that while bagel shop owners didn't care about the improved quality, other industries, such as defense and aerospace, did. They needed high-quality metal wire baskets for their production and Marlin Steel was able to provide them with what they needed. Now, Burnstein said, the company has more workers and they make \$30 an hour with benefits.

Michael Cicco, general manager, North American Distribution for FANUC Robotics, said that he's heard about the Marlin Steel story and can proudly say the company is a customer of FANUC.

"There are a thousand people like Mr. Greenblatt," Cicco said. "He's been very outspoken to the media about what can be done and is a great example of what is known as reshoring - bringing industry back to the United States."

Although FANUC has its North American headquarters in Auburn Hills, Cicco said they have people "all over the place." And they are promoting the idea that with automation, factories can be here instead of overseas and these factories can be safe places where workers are empowered and enjoy coming to work, instead of being places that require mindless repetition from low-skilled workers. The company maintains a training facility in Oakland County to train people in robot operation.



The auto industry is the largest customer for robotics manufacturers.

Improved technology has also made it possible for companies like FANUC to place machines in businesses that it previously couldn't. "We made it possible to steril-

ize robots," Cicco said. "That's actually a big deal because robots can be used more in food processing plants where being sterile is really important."

Tech Industry in Michigan 'Only Going to Get Bigger'

by Jim Stickford

Ken Rogers, executive director of Automation Alley, said the results of the group's 2012 Industry Report showed something interesting - Metro Detroit is number three in the total number of science, technology, education and mathematics (STEM) degrees in the country.

"The fact that we are third in the total number of STEM degrees was surprising to me," Rogers said. "We were surprised when we learned that fact, but I don't think that the business community is aware of the kinds of results coming from our educational institutions."

"We know that the importance placed on STEM knowledge is critical for people in the 21st century. It was pleasant to learn that we're creating a workforce with the skills and education needed for a knowledge-based society."

The report stated that the region is first in the number of people working in architectural and engineering occupations, first in the total number of advanced automotive industry establishments, third in the total number of all STEM degrees completed at area institutions, trailing only Chicago and Boston, fourth in the percentage of total employment (12.9 percent) that is within the technology industry and fifth in the total number of jobs (210,984) in technology centers.

Rogers said that the Detroit region produced 7,748 STEM degrees in 2009. The study also

showed it is also fifth in the total number of technology industry establishments, with 7,119, behind Chicago, Dallas-Ft. Worth, Atlanta and Boston.

"This is good news for the region because more and more people who get these degrees here are staying here," Rogers said. "Our economy has improved and that is the opposite of what happened in the past during the recent slowdown. It used to be that people who got STEM degrees here had to leave to get good jobs."

Rogers said that issuing this report helps get the word out that the Detroit region has a culture of innovation and that this area can attract STEM graduates from other parts of the country.

"Also, our cost of living here is

much lower than in a place like Silicon Valley," Rogers said. "It's just cheaper to live here. I saw a house that someone in Silicon Valley paid \$2.2 million. I'm talking about a house that is only 1,200 square feet."

By helping show the world and area businesses that Detroit is a smart place to do business, Rogers said he believes that it encourages people to build on the infrastructure that is here. It encourages people from here to stay here.

"If you want a job in a variety of technical areas, we're showing that we have them here in Southeast Michigan," Rogers said. "You can unpack your car, get a nice house that's affordable in an area that's a nice place to raise your family and have a great quality of

life while working in an area that promotes innovation."

Automation Alley initiated the report because the group wants to promote the strength of Southeast Michigan as a center for excellence, Rogers said. Since the report was issued in early February, he's heard from major media, including *Crain's* and *The Huffington Report*.

"Our technology industries are our best-kept secret," Rogers said. "I want to tell our story. GM just changed its relationship with Hewlett-Packard and are moving a lot of tech jobs here."

"The tech industry is only going to get bigger. There's a knowledge-based society creating the future for Southeast Michigan right here, right now and that story needs to be told."

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