



Tucson Time

ANNUAL MEETING IN SUNNY ARIZONA

by Penny Stacey and Charles Cumpston

To figure out the future of the industry—a burning question on most of our minds—one doesn't need a crystal ball, one just needs a newspaper, according to Don Ableson, president of Ableson Consulting LLC and former executive director of the North American Specialty Vehicle Activity for General Motors. Ableson pointed out a number of automotive headlines from the last few months at the recent auto glass conference in Tucson, Ariz.

"These headlines are precursors of evolutionary changes that will be happening to our industry," he said in his keynote address. Ableson opened the conference on February 12 to an audience of about 60 people. He pointed out a variety of recent headlines that have appeared in the news, such as ones dealing with changing global economics, various economic factors throughout the world and the fuel issues the world has been experiencing.

He also noted that with the economy in its current state, what customers are looking for is changing too.

"To succeed as a business today, you must have the highest quality and the lowest price," Ableson said, adding that this is compelling many manufacturers to outsource parts

He also mentioned the possible sale of PPG's auto glass business to Platinum Equity and the litigation that has

followed (see related story in January/February 2008 *AGRR*, page 10), along with the possible sale of some of Ford's glass plants.

"Time will tell the final chapter for these two glass companies," Ableson added.

For future trends, Ableson noted the explosion of panoramic sunroofs (mentioning that he saw several in the parking lot of the JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort where the conference was held), along with an increase in head-up displays. He also mentioned a December 23 New York Times headline about Porsche possibly taking over Volkswagen in the near future.

"The glass industry must embrace the principles of the OEMs, including global consolidation..." Ableson said.

Profits and People

After Ableson's discussion, the group broke into small groups to discuss a variety of topics from sales and profit to utilizing technology.

Richard Voreis of Consulting Collaborative moderated a session on increasing sales and profits.

He started by explaining, "I'm often asked how you can improve your business and I say you have to adapt to change. I see very similar problems and issues at companies that are having problems. You have to be sure your employees are focused

and that they share in the need to have a profitable company. If there's only one thing you take out of this session, that's it."

Voreis had attendees fill in a 13-question self-assessment of their businesses, which focused on the communication between management and employees.

He then asked attendees to share what they had done to increase sales at their companies. One person indicated that he had hired an outside salesperson, while another said conducting continuing education courses for insurance agents had been successful.

A lengthy discussion of yellow pages versus Internet as a marketing tool followed. Most said that they are finding the Internet more successful and that increases in the cost of yellow pages advertising is making the decision to switch easier. However, it was mentioned that the price of advertising online is also increasing as more companies are using it and bidding on the costs of placement.

Part of the discussion of increasing profits centered around employee incentive plans. In group discussion the point was made that any incentive plan has to be easy for the employee to understand and that making changes to incentive plans is fraught with danger because people don't like change and may not understand why

ROLAGS Meeting Held in Tucson

The Repair of Automotive Glass Standards Committee (ROLAGS) met during the National Auto Glass Conference in Tucson, Ariz., and Jay Sampson was approved as the new chairman.

The product performance subcommittee is headed by Keith Beveridge, senior vice president for the Savage, Minn.-based Novus Glass, and he reported that the group is trying to prioritize the various issues involved in product performance and to decide what it is important to test.

"We're at the stage now where we're talking about the type of testing," Beveridge told the whole committee. "We're going to do this on two levels: one on what tests are available and one on the real world of testing and its results."

He estimated that it would be a year or two before the subcommittee would be able to come back to the committee with a recommendation on the results of its work.

Jackie Newman, president of Redline Inc. in Austin, Texas, was chosen to head up the new marketing committee. She said that in her opinion a good place to start is to get more industry support for the standard.



Seminars during the conference ranged from employee labor laws to the state of the current economy.

the change will be better for them. "Keep it simple," Voreis advised.

Incorporating Technology

Joel Timmons, founder and president of Profitable Glass Solutions and the author of a bi-weekly blog on AGRR's daily e-news site, glass-BYTEs.com™, held a session on incorporating technology into your business for efficiency purposes. Attendees also brainstormed ideas for software needed to help with this.

One hot topic was the recent DOT 430 recall, and how additional technology could have made this easier for shops to pull records to find out when and where the recalled DOT 430 glass

had been used.

"We register the glass parts and write them down, but to find these pieces, we've got to get this information into some kind of form," said Dave Burns of Ray Sands Auto Glass in Rochester, N.Y.

Bud Oliver of NAGS also chimed in, noting that there's been talk for a long time of having standard barcodes that shops could scan among the manufacturers of glass.

"The recall of this glass adds more importance for us to get this thing done," Oliver said. "If we could get to the point where we have a standard, it could go right into your database and be much more efficient."

Managing Employees

Carl Tompkins, western sales manager for SIKKA Corp. and an AGRR columnist, moderated the session about managing employees. (See Tompkins' column on page 8.)

He said the discussion could be divided into three sections: Finding good help, training them and keeping them.

Tompkins said that in his experience a company does not find good help. "You have to make it. The hiring process is where you have to be pickiest. Hire the right people," he advised.

In discussing how to find good employees, several attendees said they are using the Internet to find people and having success at it. The technique

Breakout sessions were part of the conference's re-tooling for 2008. The conference is expected to fold into the GlassBuild America show in 2010.



"There are as many ways to go green as there are to play golf."
—Doug Linderer, Go-Glass Corp.

works for trainees and support staff, but has not been successful for experienced installers. Several attendees said that they find good people through their current employees and use incentives for those who recommend people who are hired and stay with the company.

During the discussion of the steps taken to qualify potential employees (run credit and background checks, have a drug test) one successful method which was brought up was telling a prospective employee that there is a \$50 deposit for the drug test which is then refunded after the test is successfully passed.

Once you have hired good people, you have to tell them what they have to do to be a good employee and then teach them how to do it, Tompkins explained.

"Keeping good help is the most important of the three sections," according to Tompkins. "You don't want to train good people and then lose them to your competition," he said.

To retain good employees, Tompkins said to keep in mind the needs of

employees and let them know how you are measuring them. "Teach by example. Do as you want your employees to do," he advised.

Safe Shops

While safety is usually a big topic, it almost always focuses on the safety of installations, but Charles Turiello of Diamond Triumph Glass actually focused on safety of workers in his discussion.

"The message has to be communicated on a daily basis," Turiello said. "We're trying to reduce the number of injuries in the workplace."

He suggested that shops form safety committees and contact OSHA to help define best practices for their businesses.

"A lot can fall under the best practices umbrella," he said.

Mike Boyle of GlasWeld Systems said his company contacted OSHA and had OSHA do a free, three-day study of the business to evaluate it for safety issues.

Turiello added that it's important to instill the safety-on-the-job concept in employees from the start.

"When someone walks in that door, you want to train them right from the start," he said, adding that all employees should be involved, from CSRs to CEOs.

Green is Good

The conference's first day ended with a panel session called "Green is Good." And at least three of the four speakers on the panel had something in common—they're all conservatives who insist they're not "tree-huggers." Mike Boyle, president of GlasWeld Systems in Bend, Ore., Dave Burns, president of Ray Sands Glass in Rochester, N.Y., and Doug Linderer, president of Go-Glass Corp. in Salisbury, Md., all preceded their discussion of how their companies have gone green with similar statements about how they never expected to become environmentalists.

But, they all have, in some form or another—and they all agreed that green is good.

Boyle provided an overview of how his company has gone green, even by changing their light bulbs into green-friendly ones, and advised how businesses can utilize green ideologies to their benefit by marketing to the "conscious consumer." Boyle, who is a member of the National Windshield Repair Association's Board of Directors, provided a similar presentation at its annual conference in November 2007 (see related story in November-December 2007 *AGRR*, page 46).

"Every decision we make is based on the question, 'is it environmentally sustainable?'" Boyle said.

Burns actually asked a local power authority to audit his company and advise how the company could save energy. For example, they discovered one of his three furnaces was cracked—fixing this lowered his monthly gas bill by \$300. In addition, he tinted the windows in his office

Newman Awarded Len Stolk Award

Jackie Newman of Redline Inc. in Austin, Texas, was honored during the National Auto Glass Conference in Tucson with the 2008 Len Stolk Award. The award is given annually by the National Glass Association to an auto glass industry representative in honor of Stolk, who was a manager of training for Carlite and passed away in the 1990s.

"I didn't have a speech ready, because I didn't know," said the surprised Newman upon her acceptance of the award, "but thank you."



Jackie Newman of Redline Inc. (second from right) in Austin, Texas was honored during the conference with the 2008 Len Stolk award. Her husband (left) and daughters (right) surprised her in Tucson.

with film that prevents electronic signals, such as wireless network signals, from being transmitted through them.

"Let's see—I lowered my fuel costs and I protected my business," Burns said. "That's a win-win situation."

Linderer said he started to go green when he read the book "Contract with the Earth," and soon realized that if he didn't start to make his company green, eventually it could be mandated by the government.

"If you don't construct an environmental energy platform, someone else will do it for you. Do you want the government to do that for you?" Linderer asked.

But, he added, going green can happen in a variety of ways.

"There are as many ways to go green as there are to play golf," Linderer said.

His company's motto has been to follow the three R's: reduce, re-use and recycle. The company prints on the front and back of its paper, recycles aluminum cans and has taken steps to decrease the fuel it uses.

"The company that collects our cans weighs them and writes you a check—that's my kind of green," Linderer said.

Pat Farrell, vice president of corporate responsibility and communications for Enterprise Rent-A-Car, also participated in the panel, and advised how his national rental car company has taken steps to become environmentally friendly.

"Our goal is to ensure that our passenger vehicles and the fuel they use are acceptable to society," he said.

The company also has partnered with the National Arbor Day Foundation, and has developed a website, www.keystogreen.com.

Farrell also noted that with environmental issues becoming of more importance to society, customers look for this as well.

"This is not just about the sustainability of our planet—it's also about the sustainability of our business," he added.

Where Were the Retailers?

One question was on the mind of many during the National Auto Glass Conference in Tucson, Ariz.: where were the retailers? A brief overview of the pre-registered attendee list shows there were 32 retail companies in attendance—for a total of 90 individuals from those companies. Nineteen of the retail attendees were affiliated with Belron US/Safelite, making up 9 percent of the entire attendance, and 23 percent of the retail population.

While retail attendance did seem to be low at the conference, which this year was designed as management-type conference, those suppliers seeking meetings with other suppliers did find it worthwhile.

"For Mainstreet, the show was a great time for solidifying relationships with current customers as well as enhancing business opportunities with others," said Mark Haeck, sales manager for the Belleville, Mich.-based company. "There's nothing like a face-to-face meeting when it comes right down to it. Some of the meetings I had were timely for us strategically."

Attendance Breakdown	
Group	Number of Pre-Registered Attendees
Suppliers	80
Non-Belron Retailers	71
Belron US/Safelite Affiliates	19
Conference Staff	11
Insurance Company Representatives	5
Organizations/Associations	3
Press	5

The State of the Industry

The conference ended up with a panel on the state of the industry "revisited." The panel included four company executives who each discussed a particular aspect of his business's training methods.

Rich Harrison, chief operating officer of Belron US, focused on the emphasis his company has placed on technical excellence as vehicles have become more and more complex in recent years. Showing a slide of the XC60 Volvo, which has a glass roof and an active cruise control system that measures how close a vehicle is to others in traffic, along with the speed of the traffic, he said, "You can imagine if you screwed this piece of glass up."

He also mentioned the company's focus on customer service.


"We have quite a few associates answering phones across the United States who care as well," Harrison said with a laugh, in response to a comment by fellow panelist Cindy Rowe Auto Glass vice president and general manager Rodger Pickett, who noted that part of Cindy Rowe's identity is that the company "cares more than the national guy."

Pickett spoke about developing customer service sales representatives; Steve Mort, chief executive officer of Don's Mobile Glass spoke about employee recruitment and training; and John Webb, president of Deals Auto Glass Service Inc. spoke about diversifying an auto glass business.

Next Year

While this year's conference, unlike years past, was designed to be more of a management forum than a trade show, those in attendance seemed to have found what they were looking for (*see sidebar above*).

Next year's auto glass conference—likely the last one as we know it—will be held in Orlando, Fla., February 18-20 at the Omni Orlando Resort at ChampionsGate. Leo Cyr, vice president of the NGA's auto glass division, announced during the conference that the conference likely will migrate into GlassBuild America in 2010. ■

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