

Selling the steak not the sizzle

What's your picture of a machine tool salesman - shiny blue suit, cigar and driving a Buick? That was true 25 years ago. Today it's a blue blazer, designer water and a jeep Cherokee.

And what's your memory of the last machine tool open house you attended - same blazer-clad sales guys, machine tools manned by smock-coated operators and a groaning buffet table? Cigar smokers out in the parking lot please.

One of the last companies you would expect to challenge this formula would be a Swiss machine tool manufacturer. After all, the Swiss have that somewhat dated reputation for being stodgy.

So imagine the sensation experienced as I walked into the showroom of Soudronic's Automotive Division in Livonia, Michigan. Over a magnificent buffet table and the ubiquitous blazer-clad sales guys hung a misty cloud. Ushered into a dark, curtained-off antechamber, about 50 subdued guests were gathered in front of what appeared to be a laser welding system. We all knew that Soudronic was introducing a new tailored blank welder, so we assumed that was the shape before us.

The hush, brought on by the darkness, was broken by high-decibel rock music that served as the overture to the introduction of two dancers, one clad in a metallic costume, somewhat akin to the famous Madonna costume of several years ago, with all her exposed skin and hair painted a stainless-steel color. Introduced as Macchina (see page 5), a singing, dancing female robot and her rather androgynous-looking partner were members of the cast of the musical *Space Dream*, which had recently played in Winterthur, Switzerland. Their interpretive dance, shrouded by heavy mist from a mist-making machine, led to the introduction of Soudronic's new Soutrac, a laser non-linear tailored blank welder.

Company President Bruno Kaegi said he

had been searching for a different way to introduce this advanced machine, and, while attending a performance of the musical, he came up with the idea of hiring a featured dancer to be the eye-catching introducer of the new robotic system. Macchina also performed as the machine operator, presumably to show attendees that even a pseudo-robot could easily program and run the new machine. OK Bruno, you got our attention. We even understood the message.

Even a few of the open house jaded journalists who have attended countless events were in awe of the program, which featured a continuous heavy beat music background and more artificial mist than a rock concert. This guest was glad to adjourn to the shrimp cocktail for relief from the incessant beat and a chance to talk at normal volume.

At another meeting the next day, several of the attendees compared notes about the open house, admitting that the world of machine tool open houses had a new benchmark.

This brought to mind an exhibit at an electronic components trade show. One of the exhibitors featured a scantily clad young lady whose sole function was to bend over and pick apples from a tub of water, at her feet, to hand to observers. You get the idea. Exhibitors several booths away took delight in asking passersby if they could tell what was being shown at that exhibit, other than the obvious. The majority in a random survey couldn't even identify the exhibitor company. Message clear?

So we know the message can sometimes be lost in the production. But Soudronic artfully mixed pizzazz with a clear sales pitch. They certainly got our attention and their message sunk in, as we all recalled the laser systems features after the open house.

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SWISS MACHINE

TOOL MAKER

SETS A DRAMATIC

STAGE FOR THE

INTRODUCTION OF

A NEW SYSTEM

