



## Now introducing: our new design columnist

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*By Brian K. Seitz,  
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While in Korea, working on a consulting engagement, Editor Todd Phillips and I discussed writing a series of columns for Advanced Manufacturing magazine. I was introduced to him through a mutual friend. The magazine was looking for someone with some real world insights into the world of engineering and design.

In our correspondence, he asked that I use my first column to help give you — the reader — a better sense of the perspective you might expect from my columns. So here we go...

Friends and colleagues know that I'm not shy in regard to my opinions and championing or crusading — depending upon your viewpoint — various ideas. But I've never considered myself a columnist or author. I think of those folks as people that went to college to major in journalism, communications, or English. Me? I came from an engineering background.

My father was an engineer. I grew up with the dream of designing houses. While attending college in the 1970s my academic advisor warned me that the employment prospects for newly minted architects was pretty bleak.

So rather than starve, I decided I'd design aircraft. I figured the best place to learn would probably be the US Air Force — so I enlisted. I had a whirlwind career working on the SR-71 and U-2 programs, but had no opportunity to do design. I finished my tour and applied to work for Lockheed, hoping to land a job at the famed Skunk Works department. Fate, however, had an odd sense of humor.

I was given the opportunity to assist a major aerospace vendor determine which CAD/CAM system to purchase. The corporation was at an impasse. The engineering group wanted one system, manufacturing another, and IT wanted yet another. Sound familiar? They needed an impartial third party to assist in the decision. When my name was proposed as a neutral party to each of the group executives, they said, "Oh Brian, he's one of us. He'll do just fine."

I then set out to learn all I could about the various CAD/CAM systems under consideration. I tackled everything from installation, operation, administration and futures. I even learned how to develop customer applications in each system. During that time I made my recommendation and received a job offer. Not for a design position —

but to teach people how to use the selected CAD/CAM system. I accepted the job, with the understanding that after a year of teaching I was going to design.

But my manager informed me that they didn't have anyone to plan for the installation and asked if I could give it a shot. Then I was asked to do the installation, run the system, customize it, build applications, etc. You get the picture. Eventually, I had the chance to design an entire manufacturing floor, and the processes and systems to support it. This meant long hours, tight budgets, new technology, stressed out people — but it was one of the greatest experiences of my life.

I moved on from there to consult other aerospace companies in the industrial automation and CAD/CAM field for a while when IBM made me an offer. I took the position and various other versions until I left in 1993 to start my own consulting firm — with IBM as my first client.

Around that time I also got married and my new bride suggested that I get a “real job” and go work for a corporation like IBM, or Boeing. Soon, I was interviewing at Microsoft for a lead position in marketing. You might wonder “what does an engineering / information technology guy know about marketing?” I knew a little. At IBM my role was in marketing and sales, so I was familiar with marketing to engineering oriented firms.

But I considered myself an engineering type on a temporary marketing assignment. I had to approach the whole concept of writing marketing materials from another perspective. When I decided to write an article, I related it to my personal experience. If I was doing the job, what would I want to know about?

Next, I separated from Microsoft, and returned to IBM to help reengineer processes. I left again to do independent consulting on marketing and design process reengineering for multi-national corporations.

I'm glad you're giving me an opportunity to speak with you and hope you're interested in talking back. I look forward to an active dialogue between us.

**Originally Published in Advanced Manufacturing Magazine Jan/Feb, 2006**