

# Succeeding by 'downloading resources'

■ Learning about clients' operations, needs is high priority for Methods Machinery Co.

By Angelica Semler  
News-Herald Business Writer

When a telephone call becomes an interruption, the company has grown too large and the relationship with customers is suffering.

Robert Mlakar's father founded and grew Methods Machinery Co. Inc. with that philosophy. Mlakar, president and chief executive officer of the Cleveland company, has since adopted that belief.

"My dad believed that you are only as big as the service you could give," Mlakar said. "The point being that if you ever get bigger than your ability to respond to customer needs, you start losing touch with the business."

Methods Machinery represents and markets products for machine tool builders and technological developers.

The company handles clients from four business segments — metal stamping, tool and die and mold making, production machinery and rapid prototyping and manufacturing.

"We act as a sales agency for them," Mlakar said. "We utilize their engineering people. We utilize their applications and their applied research people, their systems designers and their electronics engineers. We look at our job as downloading resources."

Since Mlakar succeeded his father in 1986, Methods Machinery has acquired Machine Tool Corp. in Indianapolis. Wing & Jabaay Inc. in Michigan has joined Methods Machinery as a strategic partner.

These are in addition to Excel 2000, a Georgia-based company Mlakar started in 1980.

In 1994, the conglomerate founded Intecore Group, a provider of support services such as machinery installation, maintenance and operator training. Mlakar describes it as the um-



Jeff Forman/News-Herald

**Methods Machinery Co. Inc. President Robert Mlakar: "We believe we're in business because of what comes to us from outside of our company and how well we respond to those opportunities."**

*Methods Machinery represents and markets products for machine tool builders and technological developers. The company handles clients from four business segments — metal stamping, tool and die and mold making, production machinery and rapid prototyping and manufacturing.*

Mlakar has a separate business card for each company.

Although it may seem odd that the companies, which are in the same business, operate as separate entities, Mlakar said a meeting of sales representatives

and what they learned from one another was too valuable to chance losing in a merger of the five companies, Mlakar said.

While maintaining independence on that side of the business, relationships between clients and the companies require

suppliers and walk directly into our office, you shouldn't be able to tell the difference," he said. "Everything about the way we run our business should be consistent with the people that we represent."

Methods Machinery achieves this by learning how clients run their businesses — from studying their objectives, strengths and weaknesses to involving both companies in planning and training.

Methods Machinery also must analyze clients before agreeing to represent them, Mlakar said.

"We really believe that we should be an outside-in company instead of an inside-out company," Mlakar said. "We believe we're in business because of what comes to us from outside of our company and how well we respond to those opportunities."

Mlakar believes the company's long-standing relationships and loyalty to customers have kept it in business for 40 years. Some clients started with Methods Machinery in 1955, Mlakar said.

A close relationship with a particular client may catapult Methods Machinery into the future.

3D Systems, a California company Methods Machinery represents, has developed rapid prototyping technology that utilizes computer-aided design to create models for polymers and plastics molds.

The process eliminates a currently expensive and time-consuming model-making method with applications in the automotive, aerospace and medical industries.

There will soon be a \$2 billion to \$3 billion market for such technology, said Bill Herington, vice president of operations for Methods Machinery.

Rapid prototyping fits right with Methods Machinery's future plans to succeed through representing technologically advanced companies, Herington said. He was a former employee at 3D Systems — a leader in rapid prototyping — and joined