



# BETTER, NOT BIGGER

*As Industry 4.0 evolves, Michigan's premier advanced manufacturing expo gains favor among attendees, exhibitors*

**G**rand Rapids & Detroit, MI—Mark Ermatinger never would have guessed a customer-appreciation event would evolve into one of the fastest-growing advanced manufacturing shows in the Midwest.

Ermatinger, an automation products distributor, came up with the idea for a local automation expo after customers packed his Zeeland, Mich. facility for an open house in October 2014. They weren't just there for drinks and hors d'oeuvres either; they pressed him for more of everything he had to offer: products, resources, education, training and peer-networking.

After the open house, he told a colleague, "We really need more space." He rented an event facility in nearby Hudsonville, Mich. and started recruiting other vendors.

He opened the first **Advanced Manufacturing Expo (AME)** less than a year later with 70 exhibitors and 11,000 square feet of expo space.

Over the next three years, AME grew from the single location near his facility to a pair of shows at major venues in Grand Rapids and metro Detroit. In 2018, the two AME shows drew more than 1,800 registrants and 335 vendors covering more than 130,000 feet of exposition space.

"It's a fraction of the size of the big automation events like IMTS and Automate," Ermatinger said. "But we're not worried about being big. We're focused on delivering an effective, cost-efficient experience for attendees and exhibitors."

That means delivering an exceptionally high level of customer service to exhibitors, while keeping the total cost of exhibiting extremely low. That also means playing to several unique strengths, especially the enormous number of manufacturing personnel that work and live within a 90-mile radius of the two show locations.

"It's a natural draw for attendees to come to Grand Rapids or metro Detroit versus Chicago or other big cities around the country," Ermatinger said. "We're close to home for a lot of engineers, maintenance staff, owners and executives, so they can spend a half-day walking the AME floor instead of having to commit to a full day — or two — of travel."

## MICHIGAN MEANS MANUFACTURING

The two AME events, held over a four-day period in August, draw the majority of their attendees from around the state of Michigan and, to a lesser extent, neighboring Great Lakes states like Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin.

Michigan's sizable manufacturing sector is no secret, particularly the automotive sector. In addition to the Big Three automakers — **GM, Ford and Fiat/Chrysler** — Michigan is home to 96 of the top 100 auto suppliers in North America and more than 2,200 facilities that conduct automotive research, design, engineering and validation.

More than 117,000 engineers call "the Mitten" home, and Michigan workers account for nearly 18.5 percent of all U.S. vehicle production.

But the state's manufacturing sector far exceeds the automotive industry. Michigan is also a leader in other industrial sectors including aerospace, furniture, food processing, defense and medical devices. Global manufacturing companies such as **Whirlpool, Kellogg, Stryker, Herman Miller and Steelcase** are headquartered in West Michigan.

Overall, an estimated 621,000 Michiganders — about 13 percent of the state's workforce — work in the manufacturing sector, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## QUALITY, NOT QUANTITY.

Even with the huge numbers of nearby potential attendees for the two shows, AME keeps focused on quality rather than quantity. The top job titles of attendees are manufacturing engineers, machinists, presidents/CEOs, production management, operations management, maintenance and sales.

"The quality of the attendees is significantly higher than the typical trade show," Ermatinger said. "Most have done their homework and kicked the tires on the Inter-

net, so they're at the show for serious fact-gathering. They're spending 10-15 quality minutes with exhibitors asking specific and pointed questions, instead of the typical three-minute demo."

Attendees are also looking for educational materials as opposed to marketing brochures, he said. When it comes to automation and advanced manufacturing, nearly 80 percent of executives turn to suppliers for education, according to a recent survey by business publication **MiBiz** and the nonprofit **Michigan Manufacturing Technology Center-West**.

Like many of his peers these days, Ermatinger finds himself doing a lot more educating than selling.

"We're at a unique point in the manufacturing era," he said. "Everyone is talking about Industry 4.0 and artificial intelligence and IIoT, and the small- and middle-market manufacturers are desperate for education and trusted sources of information."

"That's what smaller, regional expos like AME are all about: providing a setting where the exhibitors and attendees can get together and have an honest conversation."

Advanced  
Manufacturing  
Expo

Tuesday, Aug. 20 - Novi, MI  
Thursday, Aug. 22 - Grand Rapids, MI  
8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Registration is free.  
<http://www.advancedmanufacturingexpo.com>

Michigan's largest expo focused on advanced manufacturing technology provides an ideal setting for attendees to connect with the industry's leading suppliers.

This year's expo includes **Keynote Speaker Brad Waid**, an award-winning educator and emerging technology leader who works with schools, businesses and governments to improve learning, education and the human experience.

Also new this year at the Novi show: AME hosts a **First Robotics Invitational** with 24 teams competing in an all-day event on a full-size field. All team members will also have a chance to walk the expo floor, interact with exhibitors and check out real-world factory automation technology.

**AUTOMATION & MANUFACTURING SERVICES HALL:** Robots, Cobots, Laser Markers, Safety, Motion, Vision, Machine Builders, Integrators, Logistics, Universities, MMTC and The Right Place, and Other State Programs.

**METAL-WORKING HALL:** Cutting Tools, Coatings, Work and Tool Holding, Metal Working Fluids, Additive Manufacturing, and Inventory Management Solutions.

**MECHANICAL HALL:** Bearings, Power Transmission, Motors, Linear Motion, Pneumatics, Hydraulics, Process Pumps, Hose Fittings, Chemicals, Lubricants, Safety, Adhesives, and Sealants.

## A RECIPE FOR EXPO SUCCESS

Over the past two years, several of Mark Ermatinger's peers in the **Association for High Technology Distribution** ([www.ahtd.org](http://www.ahtd.org)) have sought his advice on how to evolve from the run-of-the-mill open house to a regional expo like AME. He offers some advice based on lessons learned.

**Make it easy for local attendees.** AME offers free registration for qualified attendees, including onsite registration the day of expo. "We get hundreds of registrations the last few days leading up to the show. Schedules change and since we're close, people can stop into the show for a half day to network and talk to exhibitors."

**Collaborate.** While Ermatinger invites his own vendors to exhibit in the main hall, he also collaborates with other distributors that specialize in metal-working and mechanical parts to set up additional halls for their vendors. In 2019, he plans to add another hall featuring process and instrumentation products.

**Maintain a low total cost of exhibiting at the show.** As a business owner, Ermatinger pays close attention to the total cost of doing trade shows — exhibitor fees, marketing materials, travel, hotel, meals, entertaining clients and more. Because both AME shows are in easily accessible suburbs outside of downtown Detroit and Grand Rapids, the total costs tend to be considerably lower than Chicago or other major metro areas.

**Handle shipping and logistics for companies doing both shows.** AME offers exhibitors a low-cost option to ship their show exhibits between metro Detroit and Grand Rapids. "They're the rock stars. We're the roadies. We help free up their time," Ermatinger said.

**Provide exceptional customer service to exhibitors.** AME does the "little things" to make life easier for exhibitors, Ermatinger said. "We do a private reception after setup is done, so exhibitors can eat, relax and network. The day of the show, we provide a free boxed lunch for exhibitors. There's a golf outing. We try to do the little things that they don't get at the big trade shows."

**Offer visibility for exhibitors through media partnerships, social media.** AME partners with local print, radio and TV to promote the show, but also to promote the exhibitors. A partnership with **MiBiz**, a regional business publication, allows exhibitors to promote their brands throughout the lead up to the show.

For more information about the 2019 **Advanced Manufacturing Expo**, visit [www.advancedmanufacturingexpo.com](http://www.advancedmanufacturingexpo.com) or email [joe.teague@industrialcontrol.com](mailto:joe.teague@industrialcontrol.com).