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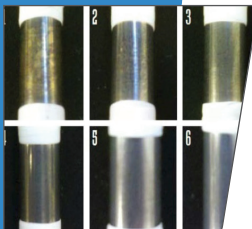
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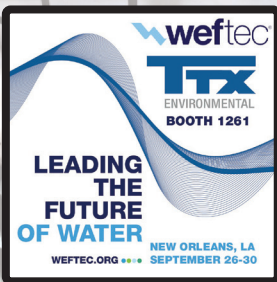
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Are You Making Informed Decisions?

The best operations aren't necessarily smarter — they have better visibility. Gardner Business Media's new Manufacturing Connected platform is designed to give every manufacturing professional that same edge.



SCOTT FRANCIS / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
sfrancis@gardner.media

Imagine getting a call from your chemistry supplier to learn that supply of a key bath constituent or a curing agent has tightened for a combination of reasons — a regulatory shift affecting a major overseas producer, shipping disruptions out of a port you've never heard of, or general upstream volatility. Time to stockpile? Maybe, but the timing might not be great. Perhaps you're slow-walking a capital decision on new equipment or a line expansion, but you're waiting to see if a new customer relationship materializes.

So, you pass on the chemistry purchase and hope for the best.

But what if you had known about the supply concern farther in advance? After all, the regulatory shift driving it had been published in a Federal Register notice. The shipping disruption was being tracked by freight analysts. It's just that this is the first you're hearing of it.

That gap between what is knowable and what actually reaches your desk in time to matter is what can keep you up at three in the morning wondering if you're making the right call.

Surface finishers are asked to carry an unusual amount of operational complexity in their heads at any given moment. A plating shop thinking about the week ahead may be simultaneously tracking bath chemistry ratios and titration schedules, OSHA and EPA compliance postures, metal commodity pricing, wastewater permit thresholds and customer delivery windows. A powder coating operation may be juggling three customer specs on one line.

What most finishing professionals are short on isn't awareness or intelligence. It's signal — the right piece of information, in context, early enough to inform what they do next.

That's a distinction worth thinking about. The finishing industry isn't lacking information — there are regulatory newsletters, supplier technical bulletins and association updates. The problem is connecting all the dots. You have to do that yourself, with whatever time the shop floor gives you, which is never enough.



PF and Gardner

Business Media (GBM) have been thinking about this problem for a while.

This year, GBM is launching Manufacturing Connected (MC), a daily intelligence platform designed specifically to narrow this gap. The goal is to take the depth of editorial that our brands have spent decades building and connect it to the pace that operational decision-making actually requires.

For PF readers, that means that when trends emerge in the automotive, aerospace or medical sectors that your customer base serves, you are able stay on top of them and get ahead of the conversation.

MC is being built around the decisions manufacturing professionals actually face. It draws on the reporting and relationships across GBM's portfolio — which includes PF, *Modern Machine Shop* and the Gardner Business Index — and structures that intelligence around the interconnected questions of technology, regulations, supply chain and market conditions.

For those of us who cover this industry, surface finishing has always been one of manufacturing's most consequential and underappreciated disciplines. A part is not done until it is finished. A plating or coating isn't just cosmetic — it can be functional or protective and in many cases is the difference between a component that survives its service environment and one that doesn't.

And yet, the professionals who run these operations often find themselves making high-stakes decisions with incomplete information, piecing together market signals from sources that don't talk to each other, and making sense of regulatory complexity in whatever time they can find between shift changes and customer calls.

MC is our attempt to help close the information gap — to help you stay on top of trends in manufacturing that influence business conditions. There's a version of the surface finishing industry I hear about when I talk to the shops that show up year after year in our Top Shops rankings — the shops who seem to be two steps ahead of every disruption everyone else is scrambling to manage. They're not smarter than the average finishing professional. They tend to have better systems, better visibility and a clearer picture of what's coming before it arrives. We hope MC becomes a trusted resource to help you do just that.

To learn more or to subscribe, visit mfgconnected.com. ■

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An Interview With ... **RAND OWENS**, GrayMatter Robotics

When *Products Finishing* profiled GrayMatter Robotics (Gardena, California) in 2024, the company was an early stage venture founded by three USC researchers targeting a problem that it believed traditional automation had largely ignored — high-mix, high-variability surface finishing. In this installment of On the Line, we catch up with Rand Owens, GrayMatter's head of marketing and go-to-market, to get an update on the company's growth, its expanding customer base and the increasingly sophisticated AI at the center of its work.



Scan the QR code to listen to the complete interview.

► **Products Finishing (PF):** GrayMatter was founded to focus on a very specific problem — high-mix, high-variability surface finishing in manufacturing — a space you felt wasn't being adequately addressed. How has the company matured since then, and what does your customer base look like today?

Rand Owens (RO): A lot has changed. We went from offering a handful of autonomous point solutions to providing what I'd describe as a full-factory solution. We realized we couldn't just keep moving the bottleneck; we needed to solve it for the entire factory floor. That required us to take our AI to the next level. We've built some very powerful models based on our own physical data, and we've enabled our robots to communicate with one another. On the customer side, we've roughly quadrupled our base. We're now working with Fortune 100 manufacturers, defense primes, neo-primes and mid-size businesses, and we're operating in four countries. We've also grown our IP portfolio to 21 patents with 12 more pending.

PF: Some of your work with the Air Force has focused on reducing optical distortion and surface defects on acrylic and polycarbonate transparencies. Can you talk about that work and the demand you're seeing in aerospace and defense?

RO: When we first engaged on transparency work, customers were seeing about a 30% first-pass yield. We're now achieving 100% first-pass yield. What's made that possible isn't just throughput — it's the distortion-detection capability we've built into our AI. We can identify scratches and measure thickness in real time and bring surfaces to a uniform state very efficiently. It's been one of the most impressive areas of our work. That success also opened a door to MRO work, which presented a different set of challenges. You're not moving an aircraft down a line. So we developed rapidly reconfigurable, deployable cells that come to the aircraft and work on it in place. That capability also applies to other large structures that are too complex or oversized to move through a traditional process.

PF: AI has advanced rapidly since we last spoke. How does that factor into GrayMatter's work today?

RO: We still use some of the available large language models, but increasingly we're building and training our own, because we've accumulated a substantial amount of physical data that makes that viable. One tangible example is a product called Curie. What used to require five application engineers to determine the right process recipe for a given part Curie now handles autonomously. It runs experiments iteratively until it identifies the optimal parameters.

PF: One of the longstanding barriers to automation in high-mix finishing has been programming. Is that still a barrier, and how is GrayMatter addressing it?

RO: There's been a lot of scarring in this industry from integrators who promised flexibility and then came back asking for \$60,000 to \$100,000 every time a customer added a new SKU. We don't have that problem. Curie is part of how we handle new parts. It adapts and develops the application recipe without requiring manual programming.

That said, the bigger challenge I see isn't the technology itself. It's the trust gap. Until people actually visit our experience center and see it working, there's still skepticism. It's less about overcoming a technical barrier and more about helping people understand how it fits into their specific operation.

PF: Do you work with prospective customers to demonstrate the technology using their own parts?

RO: Absolutely — it's core to our process. If someone isn't willing to send us a part or visit us, the relationship probably isn't ready to move forward. We always offer to run a prospect's part through our system before committing to anything. We also go on-site. The concept of factory super-intelligence isn't just about the AI we're building — it's also about the consultative work we do on the floor. We want to understand where the bottleneck lives and where it might migrate, and we can't do that without being on-site. ■■■

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*Products Finishing Champion of the Industry
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BY BRIAN BUDZYNSKI SENIOR EDITOR

► A funny thing happened to Jamie Visker in the late summer of 2002. After an already successful career serving manufacturing plants across multiple industries, including industrial flooring, automotive component manufacturing and electrical mechanical contracting, Visker found himself managing a middle market investment banking group in Indianapolis, whose customers were banks and private equity groups buying and selling various companies.

"I was brought in by LaSalle Bank in Chicago," Visker recalls. "A private equity group had bought surface finishing companies — plating and powder coating — and one large plating operation had lost 40% of its business in the first year, which ended up taking the group down. So, the group threw the keys to LaSalle, and LaSalle brought me in to sell the companies off. Well, one of the companies was Winona Powder Coating Inc. [WPC]."

Just the year before, he had pivoted away from land development in southern Indiana, having built a marine and a condominium complex — "to prove I could lose money in land development with the best of them," he blithely recalls — but the desire for ownership never fell away. When the future of Etna Green, Indiana-based WPC was up for grabs, despite having no previous experience with powder coating or product finishing, Visker saw the unique opportunity and went all in.

"I had a pretty good idea what to do with it, you know?" he says. "It was 20% of the size it is now. Since LaSalle said they had no conflict, I made the offer and closed on it Sept. 16, 2002. I was the banker brought in to sell it and ended up buying it."

The intervening 24 years have brought not only major developments to WPC, but for Visker an unrelenting drive toward continuous innovation across every facet of the business, embracing new technology, bolstering quality systems and elevating standards of professionalism in the surface finishing industry.

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Locations: Etna Green, Indiana (HQ); Elkhart, Indiana

Associations: Young Presidents Organization (YPO); Industrial Finishing and Coating Association (IFCA); Powder Coating Institute; Electrocoat Association; Elkhart Chamber of Commerce (Indiana); Kosciusko Chamber of Commerce (Indiana); Kedco — Kosciusko Economic Development Manufacturers Roundtable.

Advice for future generations: "Take it seriously. Always focus on being the dependable partner. It was unfathomable a decade ago that we would serve companies of more than \$1 billion in revenue, but now we serve a large number of those customers."



The Winona Powder Coating (WPC) team recently celebrated another milestone with its 1 millionth part shipped to partner Autokinton in June 2026. Source | WPC

Vision and growth

WPC began in 1974 as a fabricator, turning to powder coating in 1979. For many years, it subsisted as a job shop powder coating operation. Under Visker's leadership, it has bloomed into a high-volume industrial coating company.

"When I bought the company, it was typical, in those days, for your market to be within a 100-mile radius of your plants," Visker says, "So most customers were local, and while we grew in that market, I wanted to push as we were going along for higher-value customers."

After achieving ISO 9001 certification in 2008 (and subsequently in 2015), Visker began the full-bore transformation of WPC into a highly diversified finishing operation. Today, the company runs two facilities in central Indiana with a combined 230,000 square feet of space and boasts a client list ranging from marine to automotive to agricultural and myriad industries. Powder coating operations are now coupled with a successful ecoat line as well.

For Visker, growth and success come down to two key pillars: partnership and people.

"The crucial question is how do we solve a customer's problems? Hard is not 'hard.' We like hard, and I think the mindset of wanting to be a business partner [makes you] focus on everything more," Visker says. "For our customers, it's an open door. They can come in here anytime and see their parts being run or see other parts being run on our lines. We get a pretty warm reaction to that, because they don't get that everywhere. Our goal is to boost transparency. As far as value chain goes, we're 10% of your costs, so we're not a huge cost driver, but 100% of your image. We're a huge driver in terms of the aesthetics and corrosion performance, which far exceeds what the cost is. So being transparent, being open and completely candid, has helped us create trust with our customers."

"I was the banker brought in to sell it and ended up buying it."

"Seeing a wall of parts that are finished coming down the line ... I mean there's a sort of beauty in what we do. I love looking at that and knowing that we did that — and I say we because the reason that we're successful is our people. They put out that repeatable quality every single day. That's why the customers are here. I am the support team for them, not the other way around."

Coming full circle

WPC is a family affair. Visker's wife, Atlanta, is the company's VP of marketing and human resources. In August, that family connection will grow.

"On Aug. 3, one of my twin boys will start working here," Visker says. "He has a business analytics degree from the University of Denver. He went to work for a small manufacturing company out there, and now he's coming here to head the implementation of a new enterprise resource planning system."

Despite multiple overtures from private equity companies, Visker is adamant that WPC is a long-term family holding.

"I see an industry that will continue to grow," he says. "We're seeing more and more demand for high-performance coatings. Just the other day, I spoke with a young person in their 20s trying to buy a powder coating company in Australia, and I told them I think this is a great industry. I see only tailwinds. I see us continuing to utilize technology, both pretreatment technology and innovations that the powder suppliers will come up with, to find more and better opportunities."

With an ever-expanding client book and a 50,000-square-foot facility expansion on the books for the company's Etna Green headquarters, Visker has primed WPC for a bright future. ■■■

CCAI Rebrands as Industrial Finishing and Coating Association

The Chemical Coaters Association International is transitioning to a new name to better reflect its mission of serving finishing industry professionals.

► The Chemical Coaters Association International (CCAI, Lakewood Ranch, Florida) is rebranding and becoming the Industrial Finishing and Coating Association (IFCA). The change is intended to more clearly communicate the association's focus on providing education, training and networking to the industrial finishing industry.

"Input from new chapters indicated that it's been difficult to easily define that CCAI provides education, training and networking to the industrial finishing industry," notes executive director Anne Goyer. "When seeing 'Chemical Coaters,' many thought we were a chemical society, making it challenging for people unfamiliar with CCAI to understand who we really are. The National Board of Directors agreed that IFCA better defines who we are, providing services and education to our local and national levels."

The transition to IFCA represents more than a name change. It is a strategic step that aligns the association's identity with the diverse technologies, processes and professionals that make up today's industrial finishing and coating marketplace. The rebranding positions the association for future growth, ensuring it remains relevant, responsive and effective in supporting finishing industry professionals for years to come.

"IFCA is a fitting name that captures who we are and what we represent," says national president Michelle Striggow. "As an equipment supplier, I always felt the need to have an elevator pitch ready to explain my involvement with CCAI. Now, with 'finishing' as part of the name, it explains itself and instantly communicates our purpose."

CCAI has been serving the industrial finishing and coating



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industry since its formation in 1970 by a group of finishers in the Midwest. It has since quickly grown, with chapters present across the U.S. and beyond. Education and networking have always been at the core of everything CCAI has done for the past 54 years. As the name change takes place, new initiatives are being launched that will serve the finishing industry's current needs, including attracting and training the next generation of finishers along with leadership training.

IFCA serves all types of industrial finishing processes, including liquid coating, electrocoating, powder coating and much more. The rebranding process will take place over the next several months. ■■■

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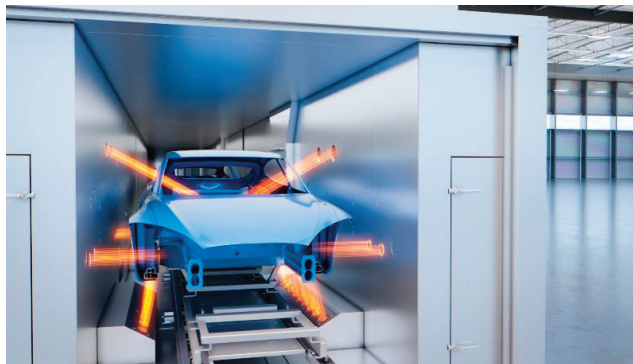
Dürr Implements CO₂-Efficient Paint Shop With Cross-Plant System Integration

Dürr Systems (Southfield, Michigan) is building a turnkey paint shop for Volkswagen Autoeuropa (Lisbon, Portugal) and implementing a comprehensive software solution. The project combines state-of-the-art application and drying technologies designed to maximize CO₂ reduction, along with an innovative SCADA integration that unifies three separate paint shops in a single system.

In 2024, a total of 236,100 vehicles — an average of 955 per day — rolled off the production line at Volkswagen Autoeuropa. The factory in the Portuguese town of Palmela is currently preparing for future model launches with the addition of a new paint shop and advanced process optimization software.

Volkswagen Autoeuropa uses the EcoBell4 Pro Hu with 2×2K technology for its clearcoat process. It specifically selected the 2×2K variant to enable the application of both glossy and matte clear coats using a single applicator, while also minimizing rinsing agent consumption during product changes. The high-speed rotary atomizer works according to the high transfer efficiency (HTE) principle, achieving application efficiencies of up to 90% and a 30% reduction in shaping air consumption. The latter results in less clearcoat being used per body. At the same time, the reduced overspray lowers the demand for air treatment, resulting in additional energy savings.

Body drying is performed by an electrically heated EcoSmartCure system. The straight-through oven, designed with stop-and-go operating concept, provides targeted heating



— particularly for electric vehicles — and reduces energy consumption through demand-based temperature control. The result is shorter drying times and reduced CO₂ emissions.

In parallel with the plant engineering, Dürr is implementing a modern, future-ready software architecture: DXQcontrol connects the new paint shop as well as two existing buildings — the main paint system and the separate two-tone system for roof painting — within a single, unified SCADA environment. The integration is reportedly challenging, because it involves migrating third-party software and upgrading an outdated system to the latest generation of DXQcontrol.

“With the cross-plant software solution, (continued on next page)”

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Stephen Boyd

Hubbard-Hall (Waterbury, Connecticut) has appointed Stephen Boyd as chief financial officer (CFO), bringing extensive financial and manufacturing experience to the company's executive team. In this role, Boyd will lead Hubbard-Hall's finance and supply chain functions, supporting the company's continued growth and long-term success.

As a member of Hubbard-Hall's executive leadership team, Boyd will work closely with leaders across the organization to support financial stewardship, supply chain excellence and continued investment in the company's capabilities.



Doug Kay

MicroCare Corp. (New Britain, Connecticut) has appointed Doug Kay as director of market and new business development. In this newly created role, Kay will focus on finding new growth opportunities, expanding strategic partnerships and driving market development initiatives across the MicroCare core industries, including electronics, medical devices, digital infrastructure, fiber optics, defense and industrial technology.

we are bringing together three separate paint shops with different technological baselines," says Felix Losch, senior manager digital products at Dürr. "But it is precisely this integration that adds the greatest value for the customer: One system instead of three, one user interface instead of multiple platforms and full transparency across all processes."

The turnkey project also includes an offline measurement cell, a paint mixing room, as well as work platforms and internal conveyor systems. In its role as general contractor, Dürr is coordinating all trades and project activities.

"The launch of the paint shop project coincides with the market introduction of a new model, requiring precise planning and close coordination across all construction phases," explains Marcus Treppschuh, senior VP sales and marketing at Dürr. "Drawing on our experience from numerous turnkey projects, we will reliably deliver on this commitment and provide Volkswagen Autoeuropa with a paint shop that sets new benchmarks both technologically and environmentally."

The project will run in three phases and is scheduled for completion by mid-2027.



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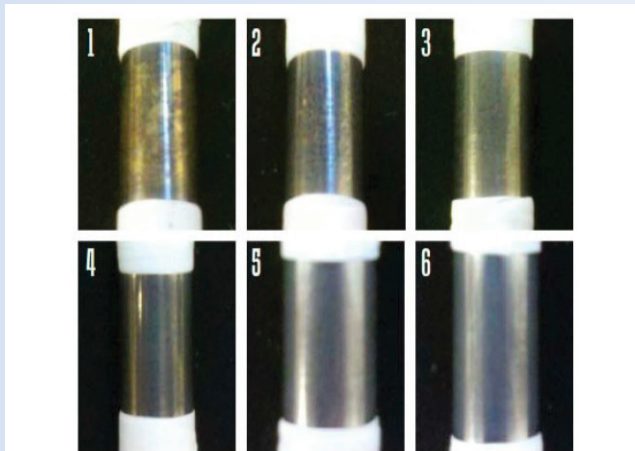
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NASF Technical Papers

Edited by Dr. James Lindsay, NASF Technical Editor

Electrodeposition of Ni-Fe-Mo-W Alloys — AESF Research Project #R-117 — The Complete Reports

Prof. E.J. Podlaha-Murphy, Chair, Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering, Clarkson University, Clarkson, New York, U.S.; Recipient of the 2026 NASF Scientific Achievement Award



This past June, at SUR/FIN 2026, the NASF was pleased to announce the 2026 recipient of the NASF William Blum Scientific Achievement Award to Dr. Elizabeth J. Podlaha-Murphy. She will deliver the 60th William Blum Memorial lecture at SUR/FIN 2027 in Long Beach, California.

When the NASF Foundation renewed the NASF Research program in 2013, NASF began by accepting a proposal put forth by Podlaha-Murphy on the “Electrodeposition of Ni-Fe-Mo-W Alloys” during her time at Northeastern University in Boston. NASF benefited from first-class research on a vital topic in alloy deposition, along with a coterie of young minds being introduced to the surface finishing field. The project addressed the induced codeposition of molybdenum (Mo) and tungsten (W) alloys with nickel (Ni) and iron (Fe), with a focus on developing a toolbox of plating conditions to deposit different combinations of Ni, Fe, Mo and W. In addition, the students became skilled in technical writing.

It is timely, then, to publish the output of this 2013-2016 project, showing the caliber of Podlaha-Murphy’s work in meriting the award. The complete set of quarterly reports produced from this work can be accessed and printed at: short.pfonline.com/NASF26-Aug1.

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MacDermid Enthone Grows Partnership With Gator Motorsports FSAE Team

MacDermid Enthone Industrial Solutions (Waterbury, Connecticut) has expanded sponsorship and technical partnership with the University of Florida's Formula Society of Automotive Engineers (FSAE) team, Gator Motorsports. This renewed commitment follows a highly successful 2025 season where the collaboration drove significant performance gains at the FSAE Design Competition.

Gator Motorsports, a student-run organization that designs, builds and races Formula-style cars, made the strategic transition from internal combustion to electric power in 2023. After facing initial engineering hurdles, the team partnered with MacDermid Enthone to optimize the vehicle's high-voltage power transport system. The partnership yielded immediate results at the 2025 FSAE Electric competition in Michigan, where the team climbed 10 positions to finish 25th overall out of 88 international teams.

"Building on last year's momentum, our second year really comes down to precision," says Nicole Valdes, president of Gator Motorsports. "We are focused on fine-tuning the integration of our busbar components to maximize efficiency. Having direct access to MacDermid Enthone's technical team [previously] allowed us to bypass the trial-and-error phase and move straight into high-level optimization, making us more and more ready to compete."

For the 2025/2026 season, MacDermid Enthone will continue to supply its low phosphorus electroless nickel (EN) plating for the vehicle's busbar components. Additionally, Ambrose



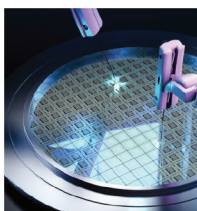
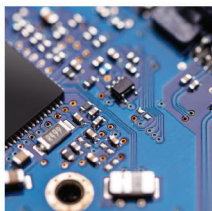
Schaffer, product manager for wear-resistant coatings at MacDermid Enthone, will continue to provide the students with hands-on technical support and education.

"We believe that putting down roots in the engineering community means investing our time in the people who will lead the next generation of automotive innovation," says Schaffer.

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The Return of Metallic Design

After years of monochromatic styling, blacked-out trim packages and painted trim, OEMs are once again using metallic surfaces to create distinctive vehicle identities to define consumers' in-vehicle experience.

BY KEATON CURRAN CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Source (All Images) | MacDermid Enthone Industrial Solutions

Metallic finishes are making a noticeable return to automotive design. After years of monochromatic styling, blacked-out trim packages and painted trim, OEMs are once again using bright chrome, satin metallics, dark chrome and painted metallic surfaces to create distinctive vehicle identities that extend beyond aesthetics and help define consumers' in-vehicle experience. This aesthetic pivot reflects a broader desire to create distinctive vehicles that communicate craftsmanship, quality and brand character.

Increasingly, consumers interact with the finish before they appreciate the component itself. The surface has become a direct expression of quality, craftsmanship and brand identity, making decorative finishes as important as the components beneath them. Consequently, designers are now leveraging a wider range of finishing technologies and materials to create more sophisticated appearances across both interior and exterior vehicle components. Decorative surfaces are increasingly expected to deliver not only visual appeal, but also durability, sustainability and manufacturing flexibility.

At the center of this evolution is decorative plating. Modern trivalent chromium technologies have rapidly become the preferred solution for automotive decorative chrome, supporting the industry's transition away from legacy hexavalent chromium processes while delivering the bright, blue-white appearance consumers traditionally associate with automotive chrome.

At the same time, advances in chrome-free etching technologies are helping manufacturers eliminate hexavalent chromium and PFAS-containing materials (hazardous substances that have long been subject to regulatory scrutiny) from decorative plating processes. Together, these developments are creating a more sustainable finishing supply chain while expanding design possibilities across plastics, aluminum, zinc die cast and steel components — ultimately achieving a new generation of decorative finishes that combines traditional metallic appeal with modern manufacturing and environmental expectations.

Decorative finishes as a design language

Decorative finishes have evolved beyond simply protecting components or providing a metallic appearance. Whether on exterior grilles, window surrounds, emblems and trim components, or on interior bezels, speaker grilles, switches and console accents, decorative surfaces contribute significantly to the consumer's perception of quality and craftsmanship.

While plating on plastics (POP) remains a cornerstone technology for decorative automotive applications, designers today view decorative finishes more holistically across multiple substrates. Plastics, aluminum, zinc die cast and steel

each provide unique performance, manufacturing and design advantages depending on the application. Modern finishing technologies enable OEMs to maintain a consistent appearance across these materials while leveraging the strengths of each substrate.

This approach is driving greater integration between materials, manufacturing processes and decorative finishes, allowing designers to focus on appearance and user experience rather than the limitations of individual substrates.

Over the last decade, automotive styling experienced a significant shift toward painted surfaces, dark appearance packages and minimalist design themes. While these finishes continue to play an important role, many designers are rediscovering the visual impact of metallic surfaces, and OEMs are increasingly reintroducing chrome-inspired accents and metallic details to create contrast, highlight key design features and establish recognizable brand signatures.

The industry's renewed interest in metallic aesthetics does not necessarily mean a return to the styling philosophies of the past. Instead, designers are using metallic finishes more selectively and strategically. Bright chrome may highlight a vehicle's signature features, while satin metallic finishes create sophistication and restraint. Dark chrome and black metallic appearances offer a modern interpretation of traditional decorative surfaces, creating distinctive visual identities without sacrificing the premium feel associated with metallic finishes.

This trend is visible across both mainstream and luxury vehicle platforms, demonstrating that metallic surfaces remain one of the most effective tools available for communicating quality and design intent.



Chrome trim is becoming increasingly attractive to car buyers as a symbol of quality and status.

The evolution of decorative plating technologies

As styling requirements have evolved, decorative plating technologies have advanced alongside them.

Decorative POP continues to offer a combination of lightweight construction, design flexibility and authentic metallic appearance. Through carefully engineered layers of copper, nickel and trivalent chromium, plated components can achieve the appearance and feel of solid metal while maintaining the manufacturing advantages of engineered polymers.

Additionally, modern plating systems provide optimal adhesion, corrosion resistance and durability so that decorative surfaces can withstand years of environmental exposure and consumer interaction. Components manufactured from ABS, PC/ABS blends and engineered plastic resins can achieve finishes that are virtually indistinguishable from metal, delivering premium aesthetics without the weight and cost penalties associated with solid metal components.

At the same time, decorative plating technologies have expanded far beyond traditional bright chrome finishes. Today's systems offer a broad range of appearances that enable designers to tailor finishes to specific vehicle programs, trim levels and brand strategies.

Trivalent chromium becomes the new standard

One of the most significant transformations within automotive decorative finishing has been the rapid adoption of trivalent chromium technologies.

For decades, decorative hexavalent chromium plating served as the industry standard for bright chrome finishes. Today, however, automotive manufacturers are increasingly transitioning to trivalent chromium systems as they pursue more sustainable supply chains and seek to eliminate legacy hazardous processes from vehicle production.

Modern trivalent chromium technologies have largely eliminated the historical appearance gap between trivalent and hexavalent chrome. Advanced systems deliver the bright, blue-white appearance associated with decorative automotive chrome while meeting demanding OEM requirements for corrosion resistance, durability and production consistency.

Beyond reproducing traditional chrome appearances, trivalent technologies also provide greater flexibility in finish design. Technologies such as MacDermid Enthone's TriMac BLUE demonstrate how modern trivalent systems can reproduce the appearance and performance of traditional decorative chrome while enabling a broader range of finishes. Bright chrome, satin chrome, dark chrome and black chrome appearances can all be achieved through modern trivalent systems, giving designers a significantly broader palette than was previously available.

Chrome-free etch and sustainable manufacturing

The evolution of decorative plating extends beyond the final finish itself. Significant innovation has also occurred in pretreatment technologies.



Metallized detailing in the cab provides a “clean” look.

Historically, chromic acid etching played a critical role in preparing plastic substrates for metallization. While highly effective, these systems relied on hexavalent chromium chemistry and increasingly complex environmental management practices.

Today, chrome-free etch technologies are providing a new pathway for decorative plating. These advanced systems prepare polymer surfaces for metallization without the use of hexavalent chromium and also help eliminate PFAS-containing materials from the process.

The benefits extend beyond environmental compliance. Chrome-free etch technologies improve workplace safety, simplify waste treatment and support broader corporate sustainability objectives while maintaining the adhesion and performance required for demanding automotive applications.

Together, chrome-free etch and trivalent chromium technologies are helping establish a more sustainable decorative finishing supply chain while preserving the quality and durability expected by OEMs and consumers alike.

Beyond chrome

One of the most exciting developments in automotive decorative finishing is the increasing use of multiple surface technologies within a single design. While chrome remains a defining decorative finish, modern designers are no longer limited to exposed metallic surfaces alone. Decorative plating is increasingly being combined with advanced paint systems, texture development and selective metallization techniques to create entirely new aesthetic experiences.

Painted chrome finishes have emerged as a particularly important trend for automotive leaders to keep an eye on. By applying transparent or opaque color layers over plated surfaces, manufacturers are able to create unique visual effects while retaining the durability, corrosion resistance and cool-to-the-touch characteristics associated with metallic finishes. These designs provide the depth and richness of chrome while introducing color and styling flexibility not possible with plating or paint alone.

Once primarily limited to badges and emblems, painted chrome technologies are now being applied to some of the largest decorative components on vehicles, including grilles, fascias and exterior trim systems. These applications enable OEMs to create distinctive appearances while maintaining the premium qualities consumers expect from metallic surfaces.

Advances in chrome-free etch technologies have also enabled 2K plating processes that allow plated and non-plated areas to coexist seamlessly on a single component. This capability creates opportunities for contrast, texture variation and integrated design features without increasing assembly complexity.

The future of automotive surface design

The future of automotive decorative finishes may not be defined by a single finish technology, substrate or appearance, but by the integration of multiple surface technologies into a unified design language. As OEMs seek greater brand differentiation, decorative plated surfaces are increasingly being combined with paint, texture, lighting and selective metalization to create visual signatures that extend across entire vehicle platforms.

Painted chrome finishes are now appearing on some of the largest plated components on vehicles, both interiors and exteriors. Transparent color coats, satin metallic effects, dark chrome finishes and multi-material assemblies are providing

designers with unprecedented freedom to create distinctive appearances while retaining the durability, premium feel and cool-to-the-touch characteristics associated with metallic surfaces.

At the same time, modern trivalent chromium technologies and chrome-free pretreatment processes are establishing a more sustainable foundation for the next iteration of automotive finishes. These advances allow designers and manufacturers to focus less on process limitations and more on the creative possibilities of surface design.

What was once a simple chrome accent is evolving into a sophisticated design platform capable of delivering entirely new aesthetic experiences. As designers continue pushing the boundaries of appearance and functionality, decorative POP remains positioned at the intersection of engineering, sustainability and automotive artistry, helping define how future vehicles will look, feel and distinguish themselves in an increasingly competitive marketplace. ■■■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

KEATON CURRAN is product manager at MacDermid Enthone Industrial Solutions.

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Balancing the Art of the Possible and Practical

The global electric vehicle market has been on a steady rise for more than a decade, but with slow adoption in the U.S. relative to the rest of the world, what can the coatings industry do to support OEMs?

BY BRIAN BUDZYNSKI SENIOR EDITOR

► According to the International Energy Agency's (IEA) Global EV Outlook 2026, nearly 22 million electric vehicles (EV) were manufactured worldwide in 2025 — a 25% increase over 2024 — and EV sales are expected to reach 23 million in 2026, accounting for nearly 30% of all vehicle sales. Demand for EVs has been on a slow but steady rise over the past decade; however, that demand has kicked into overdrive due to a conflation of factors, primary of which are the ongoing energy crisis stemming from conflict in the Middle East and an evolving focus on sustainability. Yet, while demand is there, the strength of the region-to-region EV market is far from uniform.

The United States, while ahead of strong exporting nations in Asia-Pacific (Japan and Korea), is significantly behind China and the European Union (EU) in EV manufacturing. In 2025, China and the EU produced 15.9 million and 3.2 million EVs, respectively, against domestic demands of 13.2 million and 2.9 million, whereas the U.S. produced 1 million EVs against a demand of 1.5 million — a difference that was not entirely

made up through importing, in large part due to strict national security bans on Chinese connected-vehicle technology and a 100% tariff imposed on Chinese EVs by the Trump administration. This disparity, which is expected to persist, begs the question of how U.S. EV manufacturers can hope to meet demand, while ensuring quality, safety and sustainability — and for their suppliers in the finishing industry, what is being done to support this goal?

The impact of difference

While there are a great number of commonalities between internal combustion engine vehicles (ICEVs) and EVs — identical suspension frameworks and steering mechanisms, physical chassis components, wheels and braking systems, and cabin amenities like climate control, in-vehicle navigation and entertainment systems, and lighting — the differences are where coatings shops can realize the greatest supportive impact from a quality control and sustainability perspective.

Compared to ICEVs, which have literally thousands of moving parts, EVs might seem simple or even prosaic in their design. EV drivetrains contain only around 20-25 parts, but their single-speed transmission provides instantaneous torque and acceleration with much greater efficiency than an ICEV's multi-gear transmission. However, the principal difference is in the battery power source and the protection requirements demanded by its sheer potential volatility.

“For mid-sized shops, success comes down to process control, validation and consistency.”
— Jordan Talmadge, PPG

that battery. You don't really have that same risk in a traditional ICEV,” PPG (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) global market director of substrate protection Jordan Talmadge tells *PF*.

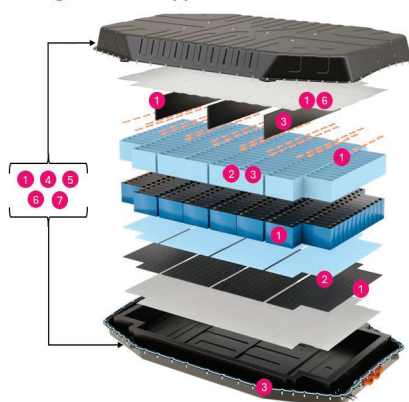
Moreover, in some cases EV design is making the battery a functional structural component of the vehicle itself, where the occupant is literally sitting over the battery as a structural part of the vehicle.

“It doesn't take a scientist to understand the degree of risk that can bring in the event of a collision,” Talmadge says. “What we see specifically with battery electric vehicles [BEVs] is that those [battery location] enclosures really need a similar degree of performance to an ICEV, if not heightened.

Electrification

So, what does this mean for the ecoat industry?

PPG's coating system approach for battery protection demonstrates how a novel combination of technologies could support broader EV forecast attainment



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5 Corrosion & Impact Protection	• ENVIROCRON • POWERCRON • DRAGONHIDE
6 Battery Fire Protection	• ENVIROCRON • CORAGUARD • CORACHAR
7 Pretreatment	• CHEMFOS • ZIRCOBOND • VERSABOND

Source (All Graphics and Images) | PPG



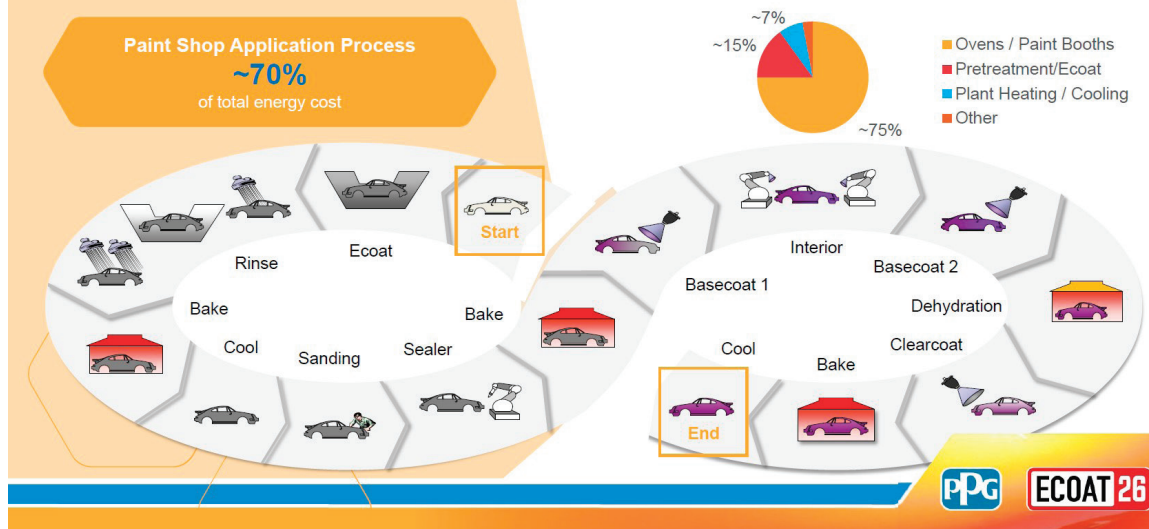
For the body-in-white, the core function of ecoat is to deliver corrosion prevention.

Those batteries are designed to last a very long time, because replacement is incredibly costly.”

The standard battery warranty for an EV in the U.S. is eight years or 100,000 miles, according to *Car & Driver*, though some OEMs go further; Tesla's warranty can extend to 150,000 miles, for example. So, what does that mean in terms of corrosion protection needs?

Automotive Paint Shop energy intensity

PPG improves productivity by reducing Auto OEM energy consumption



Validation and the Paris Effect

Astride a comprehensive interview, *PF* asked PPG global market director of substrate protection Jordan Talmadge about the effect of sustainability measures on thinner-margin shops and the possible long-term effect of the U.S. absence from the Paris Agreement on climate change.

Q: For low-cure ecoat products to turn the oven down without sacrificing performance, what does the validation process look like for a shop that's reticent to change things up?

Jordan Talmadge (JT): The key is to validate in stages. Typically, what we see is it goes from lab to pilot scale, and then from pilot to a very controlled production run with very clear pass/fail parameters. It's like anything else: You need to take incremental steps to ensure the launch will be successful and the benefits will actually be realized in practice.

What I see is the validation of three core things in parallel: corrosion, appearance and adhesion of the coating itself, along with other downstream effects that can include adhesives from a body shop standpoint, but also compatibility with downstream layers in the decorative side of the paint shop. Ultimately, the goal is to lower thermal load without sacrificing mechanical properties. If you're able to answer that central question through the lab-to-pilot-to-controlled-production process, with a clear system of checks and balances around what success looks like, it can be done. But the transition has to be managed carefully, because in an OEM production process a small hiccup can lead to major disruptions.

If you think about the bake window in its entirety, what we typically test is performance at varying points within that window — corrosion, appearance, adhesion and downstream

effects — because while we'd like to pinpoint a single performance level, there is always process variation in the real world. If you're adequately able to gauge the pass/fail of those different tests across different areas of the bake window, you can say with a high degree of certainty that there will be minimal disruption when you launch to scale.

Q: Now that the U.S. has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, what will the effect on the EV industry be, given that U.S. companies are now de-incentivized from hitting the kinds of sustainability markers that manufacturers in other countries are still adhering to?

JT: That's a tough question. I unfortunately don't have a crystal ball, but if you look at largely available public data, it shows that the U.S. will likely remain behind other regions in terms of the total percentage of EV builds.

There are two facets to it: The Paris Agreement and the Middle East conflict. Personally, I think the Middle East conflict paired with the Paris Agreement withdrawal might actually have a bit of an equalizing effect on EV adoption in the U.S. The Paris Agreement withdrawal would suggest adoption will be diminished from where it was six months ago, while the ongoing Middle East conflict suggests there could be a bit more attractiveness or momentum on the EV adoption side in the U.S. My belief is that those forces will effectively serve as a counterbalance to each other and likely produce a realization of the EV forecasts we've seen, though I do also believe the U.S. will likely remain behind other regions, with the Paris Agreement withdrawal serving as a weight that the Middle East conflict cannot fully overcome. That said, it could change just as quickly.

“In most cases, it’s a 15-year corrosion test,” Talmadge says, “so you have road spray, impact testing, sealing complexity and compositions used to deliver corrosion protection and blast protection from a thermal runaway standpoint. [Thermal runaway is a chain reaction of exothermic chemical reactions that can lead to a fissure in the battery, fire, toxic gas release or even explosion.] From both a corrosion protection and anti-blast standpoint, you need to make sure the battery is sealed adequately to help control thermal runaway events. Those are the big differences we see between EVs and ICEVs in terms of the coatings functionality required.”

By way of example, as shown in the infographic on p. 23, which was part of a presentation given at ECOAT26 on transformations in the coatings industry, each layer of the battery pack requires unique thermal and anti-corrosive properties and treatment to ensure thermal management, fire resistance and dielectric protection.

The technologies required aren’t limited to large OEMs, and the key difference isn’t access to the technology; it’s how effectively it’s implemented. “For mid-sized shops, success comes down to process control, validation and consistency,” Talmadge adds. “Applying these coatings to meet safety requirements requires a disciplined approach to application parameters, testing and quality assurance. That’s where supplier partnership plays an important role, not just delivering the product, but supporting the shop in how to apply it, validate performance and scale it reliably.”

Reducing energy use in the paint shop

In auto manufacturing, the Pareto Principle — the idea that 80% of outcomes are derived from 20% of actions — is a good North Star to follow when it comes to finding ways to reduce energy draw, Talmadge believes.

“PPG has done extensive independent studies [on energy draw], and along with third-party and other general research, we’ve seen numbers generally anywhere between 50% and 70% of energy consumption occurring in the paint shop,” he says (see infographic, p. 24). “So, from an 80/20 point of view, that’s a really good area for shops to focus on for sustainability gains.”

There are a few means by which this can be achieved. For starters, reducing the number of ovens. “A good example of oven elimination would be a three-wet or four-wet process, where essentially the coatings are applied on top of each other without those intermittent bake steps,” Talmadge says.

The second lever a shop can pull is oven temperature. “If you drop that temperature without removing the oven entirely, it will come with a productivity benefit via throughput, or in some cases, reduced energy intensity at the same degree of productivity, because you’re maintaining a lower temperature in the oven as the vehicles pass through,” Talmadge explains. “Here I am thinking of expanded-bake ecoat, for example. In a lot of cases, you actually see a

heightened degree of performance on those coatings, because they are generally of a newer generation.”

Finally, through closely monitored time management, shops can “choose their benefit” — either keeping the temperature constant and speeding up the line, or dropping the temperature and reducing the energy draw without a meaningful effect on throughput — “and in some cases, you’re able to get both.”

Alongside curation of the oven setup, shop owners should also keep a very close eye on pretreatment, which Talmadge says is generally under-recognized in terms of emerging technologies.

“Thin-film pretreatment, or zirconium-based pretreatment, provides an opportunity to reduce chemical, water and energy intensity very early in the body-in-white [BIW] treatment phase of the broader end-to-end coatings process,” he says. “And then the lasso that goes around all of this is digital monitoring, which essentially helps to drive down rework and defects — overspray, for example. And whenever you’re able to drive that down, you create less waste, and less waste means better water, energy and material usage per unit.”

Controlling the controllable

Now that China has effectively flipped the cost equation, where producing EVs is less expensive than ICEVs, the onus is on North American manufacturers to drive down cost in order to offer consumers price parity. When it comes to coatings’ place in that effort, Talmadge says shop owners need to “control the controllable.”

“The general weight of an EV’s BIW, as opposed to an ICEV, is about 5% higher — it’s a heavier mix of substrates, usually driven by the need to support the battery pack and its weight. What we’re seeing is that OEMs are trying to drive down that weight, because weight has a direct impact on vehicle range. Coatings’ role here is to continue lowering the cure temperature or expanding the bake window to allow that heavier vehicle to pass through the oven without derating the line.” While some line deration can be tolerated, it depends on capacity utilization, which is dependent on line size.

The mix of substrates used on EVs and ICEVs alike is changing — more aluminum, for example — and as substrate protection is the first layer applied, getting the coating “first-time-right” is increasingly important, specifically given the sensitivities associated with thin-film or zirconium-based pretreatment products.

“The workability associated with first-time-right is a major way coatings manufacturers can help drive EV adoption,” Talmadge says.

Workable corrosion protection

As EV platforms introduce new substrates, new corrosion challenges follow, as does a need for more agility when it comes to corrosion protection. “As substrates change — and the battery enclosure is a major area — it’s less about

corrosion per se and more about workability,” Talmadge says. “Appearance can be impacted based on the choice of substrate, its cleanliness and how it moves through the [finishing] process. The functional layers don’t really design out corrosion; instead, you engineer for it in the process.”

The coatings market and OEMs are doing several different things to drive down the carbon footprint of ICEVs, and a lot of those activities are similar to what the EV market requires as well.

“We need to make sure that as the BIW has different metals on it, it can be treated in the pretreatment process without any adverse chemical effects,” Talmadge says. “The role of ecoat and pretreatment is essentially this: pretreatment prepares the surface for the next layer; ecoat is the functional layer that protects the vehicle. There is a degree of corrosion protection in the later layers as well — basecoat, primer-basecoat and clearcoat all have some corrosion protection elements — but the core function of ecoat is to deliver corrosion prevention. The way I think about it: How can you have a pretreatment and ecoat process that’s versatile enough to address whatever shift in metal compositions comes as OEMs pursue lower vehicle weight, lower cost and maintained structural rigidity? Again, it’s about workability.”

Looking down the line

At the end of the day, the cumulative effectiveness of all efforts within the surface finishing industry will become

clearest in hindsight. That said, two key markers can be used to gauge the ongoing success, or lack thereof, of the industry’s energy reduction and sustainability support efforts.

“Having compatibility with mixed metals and emerging substrates from a workability standpoint will minimize rework — that’s the first element,” Talmadge believes. “The second element addresses how the coatings industry can drive down the cost of protecting the battery itself, so we’re talking corrosion protection, anti-blast and flame retardancy. That is a fairly novel set of needs, [but] we can support cost reduction through the coatings themselves, the application process and by complementing or replacing other materials currently used in the battery stack. One example is mica sheets, which are used extensively for blast protection. Can we help support cost reduction by thinning out or replacing that mica sheet while providing parity or improved blast protection? It’s just one example, but it illustrates the role coatings can play in helping make EVs more cost-competitive.” ■■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BRIAN BUDZYNSKI is the senior editor of *Products Finishing*. Over the last 20 years, Budzynski has worked across a range of industries from chemical science of consumer products to civil/structural engineering to aviation. Along the way, he has won a handful of ASBPE Awards for journalism, as well as a Jesse H. Neal Award and a TABPI Award.

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FABTECH Returns to Las Vegas After a Decade Away

FABTECH's FINISHING Pavilion and Conference heads to the desert for the first time in more than a decade, bringing expanded educational programming and a landmark association rebrand.

BY SCOTT FRANCIS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

► FABTECH 2026, North America's largest metal forming, fabricating, welding and finishing event, returns to the Las Vegas Convention Center from Oct. 21-23 — marking the show's first appearance in Nevada in more than 10 years. Under the theme "Innovation Without Limits," the 2026 edition packs three full days of exhibits, education and networking into one of the industry's most anticipated gatherings. FABTECH is organized by a consortium of industry associations, including the American Welding Society (AWS), the Fabricators & Manufacturers Association (FMA), the Precision Metalforming Association (PMA) and SME, each contributing to the show's educational and exhibitor programming.

For *Products Finishing* readers, the FINISHING Pavilion, organized by the Industrial Finishing and Coating Association (IFCA, formerly known as CCAI — the Chemical Coaters Association) is the heart of the show experience. Poised to be IFCA's largest FINISHING Pavilion outside of Chicago, the curated exhibitor lineup spans suppliers covering every stage of the industrial finishing process — pretreatment, coating,

curing, quality inspection and more. Whether your shop runs a high-volume powder coat line, manages solvent cleaning operations or is exploring automation for spray application, there's something on the show floor for every operation.

A new name for a new era

Coinciding with FABTECH 2026, the CCAI is unveiling its significant rebrand, relaunching as IFCA. The move reflects the organization's commitment to serving an evolving industrial finishing and coating marketplace.

"Changing an association name and rebranding is a major undertaking, and one we take very seriously," says CCAI/IFCA executive director Anne Goyer. "But our board and members believe that our new name — the Industrial Finishing & Coating Association — much better reflects who we are today. We are working hard to bring new and much needed benefits to the industry, and we think the IFCA brand will carry our messages further than in the past."

The IFCA FINISHING Pavilion and Conference continue to thrive alongside that transition, offering key educational opportunities on all aspects of industrial surface finishing.

General information

LOCATION | Las Vegas Convention Center, 150 Paradise Road, Las Vegas, Nevada 89109

DATES | Oct. 21-23

REGISTRATION | fabtechexpo.com

SHOW DATES AND HOURS

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 21 | 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

THURSDAY, OCT. 22 | 9:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

FRIDAY, OCT. 23 | 9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

REGISTRATION

Free Exhibition Registration: Show floor admission is free for those who register by Oct. 16. Registration after this date is \$50.

Finishing Conference Registration: Registration for the conference sessions is separate and open now at fabtechexpo.com/conference.

PLAN YOUR STAY

Hotels: FABTECH has negotiated the lowest hotel rates for exhibitors and attendees at popular and convenient hotels in Las Vegas. Reserve rooms now through onPeak, the official hotel provider for FABTECH. Visit fabtechexpo.com and click “Plan Your Visit” at the top of the homepage. Shuttle bus service will be available from multiple hotels except for those within walking distance of the Las Vegas Convention Center.

Education and workforce development

Ongoing education and workforce development remain central to IFCA's mission, and the FINISHING Conference Program at FABTECH is an important platform for that work. Led by respected industry experts, FINISHING Conference sessions are designed to deliver knowledge that can be applied directly to improve finishing processes, enhance operational performance and stay ahead of evolving trends.

This year's conference features 21 sessions covering a wide range of topics — from fundamental concepts to advanced techniques — designed to engage and inform finishing professionals at every level. For complete session descriptions and registration information, visit fabtechexpo.com/track/finishing. Conference registration is open now.

FABTECH's broader conference program features more than 200 expert-led sessions across 13 educational tracks. The Emerging Leaders Program also returns, offering younger industry professionals structured networking and development opportunities throughout the three-day event.

FAB to FINISH Production Experience returns

Since its debut in 2017, the FAB to FINISH Production Experience has become one of the most anticipated attractions on the FABTECH show floor — and 2026 is no exception. This interactive program gives attendees a firsthand look at the complete manufacturing journey of a metal part through the finishing process. Participants follow a designated production path through participating FINISHING exhibitors' booths, experiencing each stage of the process: cleaning, powder coating, curing and quality testing. Year after year, the program grows in momentum, attracting increasing interest and participation from exhibitors and attendees alike.

We will see you there! ■■■

The FABTECH 2026 Finishing Pavilion will feature more than 150 exhibitors representing all aspects of industrial finishing.
Source | Industrial Finishing and Coating Association (IFCA)



FABTECH 2026 Finishing Conference Program

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 21

9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

C11 | Choose Your Own Adventure: Selecting the Right Washer Chemistry
Max George and Diana St. Jacques | *DuBois Chemicals*

C12 | Powder Coating Basics – A Fundamental Understanding of a Powder Coating System

Frank Mohar | *Nordson Corp.*
John Sudges | *Midwest Finishing Systems Inc.*
Aric Yarosz | *AkzoNobel Coatings Inc.*

C13 | Processing Aluminum for Performance: Pretreatment, Anodizing and Quality Control

“Fundamentals and Best Practices in Anodizing”
Linda Newman | *Quaker Houghton*

“Improving Effectiveness and Efficiency of Pretreating Aluminum”
Mark McClanahan | *Heiche Surface Technologies*

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 21

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

C2 | Alternatives to Chemical Pretreatment: Exploring Blast and CO₂ Spray Cleaning Methods

“Optimize Blast Cleaning Efficiency and Control Costs”
Kumar Balan | *Ervin Industries*

“Automated CO₂ Spray Cleaning”
Nelson Sorbo | *Cool Clean Technologies LLC*

C22 | Beyond the Typical: Specialized Powder Coating Processes for Challenging Parts

“Successful Fluidized Bed Powder Coating Process”
Martin Powell | *Trimac Industrial Systems*

“You Want to Powder Coat What?”
Micky Ricard | *Sames*

C23 | Build Troubleshooting Know-How to Optimize Performance, Maximize Profits and Delight Your Customers
Jeff Blain | *Circle-Prosco Inc.*

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 21

3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

C31 | Optimizing Powder Coating Selection, Efficiency, and Performance
Brian Phillippi and Matthew Rush | *PPG*

C32 | Setting the Stage: Metal Cleaning Before Pretreatment
Dr. Mike Kripl | *Henkel*

C33 | Next-Generation Finishing Technologies: Tools for Faster, More Controlled Operations

“Laser Processing Enabling the 15-Minute Powder End-to-End Powder Line”
Chance Willis | *IPG Photonics*

“The Future of Industrial Finishing: Robotics Driving Precision, Efficiency and Sustainability”
Hope Dollarhide | *First Choice Robotics*

THURSDAY, OCT. 22

9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.

C41 | See It, Touch It, Fix It - Identifying and Solving Finishing Defects
David Schimpff | *DuBois Chemicals*
Jeremy Erickson | *Sherwin-Williams*

C42 | Specifying Hybrid Zinc Coatings: Hot-Dip Galvanizing + Thermal Spray Zinc
Amanda Swanberg and James Malaguti | *Valmont Coatings*

C43 | Liquid Finishing Fundamentals

“Liquid Coating Application Basics: Spray Technologies, Transfer Efficiency and Knowing Your Material”
Michelle Striggow and Wendy Hartley | *Graco Inc.*

THURSDAY, OCT. 22

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m.

C51 | Batch Vs. Automated Finishing Systems: Which is Right for You?
Nick Dawson | *Koch Finishing Systems*
Frank Mohar | *Nordson Corp.*
Jeff Blain | *Circle-Prosco Inc.*

C52 | Reduce the Rework: Process Control and Preventive Strategies in Powder Coating

“Preventative Maintenance and Troubleshooting for Powder Coaters”
Michael Wittenhagen | *Vitracoat Inc.*

“Built to Last: Controlling Powder Coating Performance Before Parts Leave the Line”
Merrick Taraska | *DeFelsko Corp.*

C53 | Optimizing Finishing Systems: Smarter Process, Flow and Control
Don Whitt, Brian Rodzilsky and Corey Meyer | *Therma-Tron-X Inc.*

THURSDAY, OCT. 22

3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

C61 | The Realities of an All-Electric Paint Line
Julian Capriles, Siemens and Aaron Hughes | *GAT Finishing Systems*

C62 | Smarter Finishing Operations: Lower Energy, Lower Costs, Better Performance

“Power Shift: Alternative Energy Strategies for Finishing Operations”
Jerry Trostle | *Eisenmann Inc.*

“The ROI of Better Finishing: A Real-World Case Study in Savings and Performance”
Josh Gilmore | *Sames*

C63 | Hands-on Safety Skills for the Finishing Floor
Marty Korecky | *MJ Korecky Consulting LLC*

FRIDAY, OCT. 23**9:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.****C71 | In Their Own Words: Job Shop Owners Share ERP Experiences**Steve Lewis | Oregon Powder Coating
Frank Laster | A-1 Powder Coating**C72 | Performance and Aesthetics in Powder Coatings: From Corrosion Resistance to Funky Finishes****“Breaking the Corrosion Cycle: Why It’s Time for a Coating Revolution”**

Sunil Kulkarni | AkzoNobel Coatings Inc.

“Funky Finishes”

Aric Yarosz | AkzoNobel Inc.

C73 | Modernizing the Finishing Line: Advanced Curing Methods and Spray-Free Alternatives**“Dry Film Application - A Low-Carbon Alternative to Sprayed and Cured Finishes”**

Joel Campbell | Taikisha USA Inc.

“UV Coatings Empowering the Re-Revolution of NA Manufacturing”

Michael Kelly | Allied PhotoChemical Inc.

Source | IFCA

**FRIDAY, OCT. 23****11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.****C81 | Using AI to Build Process Intelligence in Powder Coating**

Marlon Boldrini and Link Brown | coatingAI

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FABTECH 2026 Finishing Exhibitor List

Listed below are exhibitors in the Finishing Pavilion (as of June 24, 2026) along with corresponding booth numbers.

3D.aero GmbH | **S12045**
 Airblast AFC | **S11050**
 Akzo Nobel Coatings Inc. | **S15026**
 ALIT USA | **S15057**
 Allied UV | **S16053**
 Allredi | **S11081**
 Almco | **S18053**
 American Industrial Systems LLC | **S10022**
 Anest Iwata | **S13045**
 Apache Stainless | **S10078**
 Atotech/An MKS Brand | **S16046**
 Avin Finishing Solutions | **S18055**
 Bayco Ovens | **S12061**
 Belco Industries Inc. | **S18027**
 Blast Cleaning Technologies | **S15032**
 Blastec Inc. | **S13048**
 BlastOne | **S15001**
 Boce Industrial Systems & Bozkurt Plant Engineering | **S10024**
 Borer Chemie AG | **S11089**
 Bulk Chemicals Inc. | **S10039**
 Caldan Conveyor | **S12017**
 California Pulse | **S11056**
 Calvary Industries Inc. | **S10076**
 Caplugs/Shercon | **S11037**
 Cardinal Paint and Powder | **S13018**

Catalytic Industrial Systems | **S15049**
 Chemical Coaters Association International | **S18042**
 Circle-Proscio Inc. | **S10019**
 CoatingAI AG | **S18018**
 Combustion And Systems | **S15007**
 Compass Systems | **S18061**
 Cool Clean Technologies LLC | **S16037**
 CUC Engineering | **S12055**
 Daifuku Automotive America | **S10050**
 DCM Tech Inc. | **S16064**
 Decalcorama | **S10048**
 Decoral System | **S16039**
 DeFelsko | **S11039**
 Diamond H2O | **S10007**
 Diamond Vogel Paint & Coatings | **S15053**
 Dinamec Systems LLC | **S18039**
 DuBois Chemicals | **S15019**
 Dürr Systems LLC | **S11011**
 Eco Burn-Off Ovens | **S11042**
 Ecoclean Inc. | **S11053**
 Eisenmann Inc. | **S16056**
 Elcometer Inc. | **S16016**
 Electron | **S13032**
 Elektrim Motors | **S16049**
 Epner Technology Inc. | **N9809**

Ervin Industries | **S11014**
 Euroimpianti USA | **S15044**
 FANUC America Corp. | **S11008**
 Fast Rack Equipment LLC | **S15046**
 Filter Junkie | **S10062**
 Fischer Technology Inc. | **S16057**
 Fortress Abrasive Blast Systems | **S18035**
 Futura | **S15055**
 Galv-Pro Products | **S16035**
 GAT Finishing Systems | **S11005**
 Gema USA Inc. | **S13008**
 General Fabrications Corp. | **S16043**
 Global Finishing Solutions | **S11022**
 Goff Inc. | **S10042**
 Graco Inc. | **S13006**
 Greensolv | **S16067**
 HafcoVac | **S11048**
 Hedson Technologies | **S10027**
 Hemo Cleaning Systems USA Inc. | **S12053**
 Henkel | **S15034**
 Hentzen Coatings | **S10011**
 Herr Industrial Inc. | **S10036**
 Horizon Performance Technologies | **S11017**
 IFS Coatings Inc. | **S11019**
 Integrity Metal Finishing Supply | **S11060**
 IntelliFinishing | **S18022**

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IPCM International Paint & Coating Magazine
| **S12049**

Kansai Helios America | **S13057**

KDF | **S11049**

King Industries Inc. | **S10064**

Kleen Blast | **S15064**

Koch Finishing Systems | **S15011**

Kresco | **S10032**

Kyzen | **S11055**

La Revista Del Color Mx | **S10026**

La-Man Corp. | **S12059**

LaserXpert Canada | **S11061**

LDPI Inc. | **S15018**

Linde Advanced Material Technologies |
S10034

LPI Lift Systems | **S15013**

LS Industries Inc. | **S16034**

LS Industries Inc. | **S13039**

LubeCon USA | **S10012**

Luoyang Clear Industrial Technology Co. Ltd.
| **S10044**

Luoyang ZAC Industrial Technology Co. Ltd. |
S10046

M L Filters | **S11016**

MacDermid Enthone Industrial Solutions |
S16025

Magic Rack | **S10008**

Mankiewicz Coatings | **S11034**

Marathon Spray Booths | **S10053**

Marvel Industrial Coatings | **S18050**

Metal Coatings Corp. | **S11079**

MetFin Shotblast Systems | **S11075**

MicroClimate | **S10081**

Midwest Finishing Systems | **S15022**

Mighty Hook Inc. | **S15042**

M-Tek Spray Booths | **S13061**

Narran Laser | **S15059**

Neo S Group Industrial Solutions | **S10082**

Netalux Inc. | **S11077**

NikoTrack | **S10055**

Nordson Industrial Coating Solutions | **S13000**

Nucor Towers & Structures | **S10056**

Omegasonics | **S10037**

PacLine Conveyors Inc. | **S10060**

Pangborn Corp. | **S13024**

Parker Ionics | **S15015**

Patriot Powder Coatings Inc. | **S10092**

PEM Inc. | **S11032**

Platinum Finishing Systems | **S13053**

Pollution Control Products Co. | **S16013**

POR-15 | **S11078**

Porcelain Enamel Institute | **S11080**

Powder Coating Institute | **S10065**

Powder Coating Line USA | **S10088**

PPG | **S10005**

Products Finishing Magazine | **S12014**

Quaker Houghton | **S19064**

Quality Finishing Systems | **S18016**

Railtechnik van Herwijnen | **S12058**

Raptor Blasting Systems | **S18066**

Reliant Finishing Systems | **S13036**

RGF Environmental Group | **S16045**

RGI Spraybooths.Net | **S18009**

Rhino Dirt | **S11057**

Richard's Paint | **S10016**

Richards-Wilcox Conveyor | **S12043**

Robotic Solutions | **S13032**

Rohner Finishing Systems LLC | **S13042**

RollSeal Inc. | **S15024**

Sames | **S18024**

Sata Spray Equipment | **S10035**

Shaviv USA | **S10080**

Sherwin-Williams | **S15008**

Sidasa Engineering USA LLC | **S11026**

Spectro Coats | **S16059**

SprayTech/Junair | **S11027**

Sprimag Inc. | **S10014**

Steelhead Technologies | **S11058**



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FABTECH 2026 Finishing Exhibitor List

Listed below are exhibitors in the Finishing Pavilion (as of June 24, 2026) along with corresponding booth numbers.

Superfici America | **S18038**
 Surface Blasting Systems | **S11082**
 SurfacePrep | **S18032**
 System Technologies Inc. | **S15050**
 Taikisha USA | **S18064**
 TCI Powder Coatings | **S13015**
 Technic | **S18014**
 Tecnofirma America Inc. | **S18037**
 The Electrocoat Association | **S11045**
 The Hanson Group | **S10090**
 Therna-Tron-X Inc. | **S11000**
 Titan-Catalytic and Niko
 Conveyors | **S16011**
 Total Finishing Systems | **S13027**
 Transmet Corp. | **S12047**
 Trasmetal | **S10089**
 Trimac Industrial Systems | **S15037**
 TrinSoft | **S12057**
 Troy Chemical | **S12025**
 United Finishing Systems | **S15047**

United Surface Solutions | **S13064**
 US Strip Tank Co. | **S11083**
 Viking Blast Systems | **S15061**
 Vitraccoat Inc. | **S13012**
 Vulcan IR Systems | **S15006**
 Vulkan Blast Shot Technology | **S15066**
 Wagner Industrial Solutions | **S13022**
 Webb-Stiles Co. | **S11044**
 Wheelabrator | **S18068**
 Winoa | **S10049**
 WMV Surface Technology Inc. | **S16055**
 WolfRayet | **S11024**
 Worldwide Finishing & Supply
 Inc. | **S11046**
 Yaskawa America Inc.,
 Motoman Robotics Division | **S11088**
 Zerust Corrosion & Cleaning
 Solutions | **C7620**



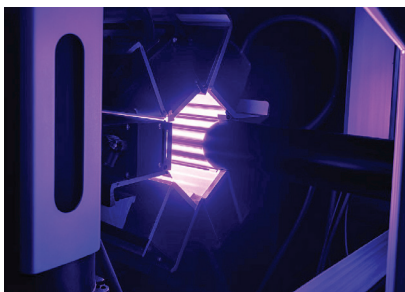
Experience the finishing process for yourself with IFCA's FAB to FINISH Production Experience. Source | IFCA



Source | Products Finishing

UV-Cured Coatings Reduce VOCs, HAPs Across Industrial Applications

Allied UV (Macomb, Michigan) develops and supplies UV-cured coating systems for manufacturers across a range of industrial markets, including pipe and tube, building products, composites and packaging.



Working in partnership with equipment and lighting integrators, the company engineers UV systems intended to address productivity and environmental compliance goals.

UV-cured coatings formulated by Allied UV are designed to contain little to no volatile organic compounds (VOCs) or hazardous air pollutants (HAPs), supporting manufacturers working to meet sustainability and regulatory targets. The systems are also said to enable increased production speeds and a reduced facility footprint compared to conventional coating processes.

Each coating is custom-formulated and tested in-house to meet specific customer application requirements. Allied UV also offers complimentary on-site service and coating checks as part of its customer support model.

Allied UV | alliedphotochemical.com | Booth S16053

Zirconium-Based Pretreatment Chemistry Cuts Sludge, Extends Bath Life

DuBois Chemicals (Sharonville, Ohio) is showcasing its DuraTEC line of zirconium-based pretreatment products. The product suite is formulated without phosphates and is designed to support paint adhesion and corrosion resistance across multiple substrate types.

Compared to traditional phosphate pretreatment chemistries, DuBois says the DuraTEC line generates less sludge, operates at lower temperatures and extends bath life — factors that reduce time and operational costs for finishing plants. The zirconium-based formula is positioned to comply with environmental and safety regulations, and are safer for workers and the environment than conventional phosphate alternatives.

DuBois Chemicals | duboischemicals.com | Booth S15019



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Phosphate-Free Zirconium Pretreatments Eliminate Hazardous Sludge in Metal Finishing

Circle-Prosco Inc. (Bloomington, Indiana) offers the Steelcote line of phosphate-free zirconium pretreatments, a family of nanoceramic conversion coatings designed to replace conventional iron and zinc phosphate systems in metal finishing operations. The products are formulated to provide corrosion resistance and paint adhesion without generating hazardous sludge.

The Steelcote line includes four products targeting different application requirements. Steelcote 1400 is designed for basic steel applications, while Steelcote 1700 is configured for spray-to-drain wand systems. Steelcote 1750 is an all-in-one cleaner/coater optimized for streamlined three-stage lines. For OEM specifications requiring multi-metal capability, Steelcote 2000 includes built-in adhesion promoters.

Because the systems operate at ambient temperatures and are formulated without heavy metals, they can reduce energy consumption and waste disposal costs compared to traditional phosphate pretreatment processes.

Circle-Prosco Inc. | circleprosco.com | Booth S10019



Tabletop CO₂ Cleaning Module Targets Surface Prep Without Water or Solvents

Cool Clean Technologies (Eagan, Minnesota) presents the Omega 1500 CO₂ integrated spray cleaning module, a tabletop precision cleaning system designed to deliver CO₂-based cleaning without requiring dedicated floor space.



The system uses recycled CO₂ — the same CO₂ grade used in the food and beverage industry — as a waterless, solvent-free cleaning medium. According to the company, the CO₂ spray leaves parts residue-free and ready for immediate downstream processing. Target applications include surface preparation, pre-weld cleaning, mold cleaning and additive manufacturing. The Omega 1500 is also a regulatory-compliant alternative for manufacturers facing pressure to move away from perchloroethylene (PERC)-based cleaning processes.

Cool Clean Technologies | coolclean.com | Booth S16037

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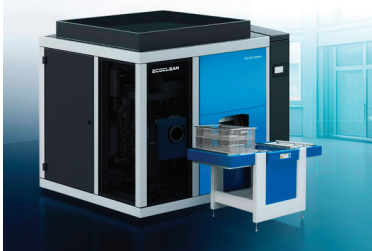
www.vitracoat.com



Solvent and Aqueous Parts Cleaning Systems for Compact, Complex Operations

EcoClean Inc. (Southfield, Michigan) is presenting two parts cleaning systems — the EcoCbase, a compact solvent-based cleaner for lower-volume operations, and the EcoCvertex, an aqueous system designed for more intensive, multi-stage cleaning requirements.

The EcoCbase is designed for facilities with smaller production requirements or decentralized cleaning stations within larger operations. The system uses nonhalogenated hydrocarbons and modified alcohols to remove oils, greases, emulsions and chips from parts surfaces.



The EcoCvertex is an aqueous-based cleaning system built around an upright cylindrical third tank designed for optimized fluid management. An optional fourth flood tank expands the system's capabilities to include spray cleaning, high-power injection flood washing and ultrasonic cleaning. The system is designed to deliver improved operational efficiency and more sustainable resource utilization for modern production.

EcoClean Inc. | ecoclean-group.us | Booth S8853

New Powder Coating Lineup Spans Detection, Delivery and Digital Monitoring

Gema USA Inc. (Indianapolis, Indiana) has several additions to its powder coating equipment lineup, including automatic spray guns equipped with object-detection technology and a compact all-in-one powder application pump.

The OptiGun GA04 automatic guns will be demonstrated alongside Gema's Dynamic Contour Detection laser scanner, designed to automatically detect object geometries during the coating process. The scanner is intended to help automatic guns adjust to varying part shapes without manual reprogramming.

Also on display will be the OptiSpray All-in-One powder application pump, which combines Smart Inline Technology, dense phase powder delivery and electrostatic application within a single compact unit.

The company will also feature GemaConnect, a cloud-based digital intelligence tool for monitoring and analyzing powder coating equipment, and the OptiFlex Pro manual spray unit, available for hands-on demonstration.

Gema USA Inc. | gemapowdercoating.com | Booth S13008



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Mobile Blast Cabinet Systems for Steel, Aluminum and Specialized Substrates

Fortress Abrasive Blast Systems

(Salina, Kansas) designs and manufactures abrasive blast equipment for surface preparation in manufacturing, fabrication and heavy maintenance operations.

The company will be displaying its mobile blast and blast cabinet systems.

Fortress systems are designed for reliable use on steel, aluminum and specialized substrates, with an emphasis on consistent results and reduced waste. The company, formerly operating as Abrasive Blast Systems (ABS), was re-branded following a 2024 acquisition by Salina Vortex and operates from a 115,000-square-foot manufacturing facility in Salina, Kansas.

Fortress Abrasive Blast Systems | fortress-blast.com | Booth S18035



Turnkey Powder Coating, Ecoat, Plating and Anodizing Systems

Koch Finishing Systems (Evansville, Indiana) will present its range of custom automated finishing systems. The company designs, engineers, fabricates, installs and services turnkey lines across all major coating technologies, including powder coating, liquid paint, electrocoat, plating and anodizing — each engineered to meet specific customer production requirements.

At the show, attendees can view videos and 3D animations of Koch systems and meet with the company's engineering team to discuss finishing challenges, whether for a new facility or an upgrade to an existing line.

Koch Finishing Systems | kochllc.com | Booth S15011



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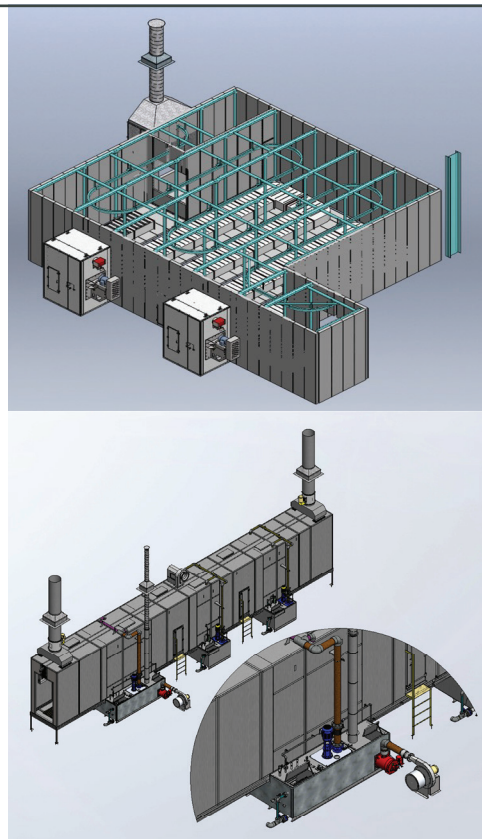
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Heavy-Duty Aqueous Parts Cleaner Targets Remanufacturing Operations

Kyzen Corp. (Nashville, Tennessee) will feature live, in-booth demonstrations of Metalnox M6356, a heavy-duty aqueous cleaning solution formulated to effectively remove heavy oils and burned-on carbon from steel and aluminum parts. The chemistry is designed for components used in remanufacturing operations.

Metalnox M6356 is compatible with spray and immersion cleaning systems, offering flexibility for shops running different equipment configurations.

Kyzen also offers a broader line of metal parts cleaning chemistries for a range of surface contamination challenges across industrial manufacturing applications.

Kyzen Corp. | kyzen.com | Booth S11055



Advanced Surface Prep Boosts Performance, Protection and Efficiency

At **MacDermid Enthone** (Waterbury, Connecticut), finishing is just the beginning. High-performance finishes begin with a strong foundation. Through advanced surface preparation, phosphating and water care technologies, the company helps manufacturers improve coating performance, enhance corrosion protection and optimize operational efficiency across the finishing process, aiming to solve its customers most demanding surface finishing challenges.

MacDermid Enthone Industrial Solutions | macdermidenthone.com | Booth S16025





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Turnkey Powder Coating Systems for Large and Oversized Parts

Midwest Finishing Systems (Mishawaka, Indiana) designs, manufactures and installs custom turnkey powder coating systems for industrial manufacturers. The company's finishing solutions encompass pretreatment washers, dry-off and cure ovens, environmental rooms, material handling systems and advanced controls, each engineered to meet individual customer production requirements.



The company offers both batch and automated finishing configurations, with a stated focus on applications involving large, heavy or oversized parts. All engineering, fabrication, transportation, installation and service operations are performed by Midwest Finishing employees — not third-party contractors or distributors. Equipment is delivered on the company's own fleet of trucks.

Midwest Finishing provides complete project management from initial consultation through installation and ongoing service, with a dedicated project manager assigned to each engagement.

Midwest Finishing Systems | midwestfinishing.com | Booth S15022

Modular Overhead Conveyor Systems Configured for Industrial Finishing, Material Handling

Niko Conveyors (Bristol, Connecticut) designs and distributes modular overhead conveyor systems and sliding door hardware for manufacturing, industrial finishing and material handling operations. The company's product line is built around a library of more than 10,000 standardized components, allowing systems to be custom configured for applications ranging from simple, manual tracks to complex, powered conveyor solutions.

Niko systems are rated to handle loads up to 4,400 lbs and are engineered for low maintenance. According to the company, the modular design supports manufacturers, warehouses,

Automatic Powder Coating Controller Manages Up to 10 Guns

Nordson Industrial Coating Solutions (Amherst, Ohio) has introduced the VT Auto Controller, a powder coating control system designed to manage up to 10 automatic guns and support as many as 250 customizable recipes from a single screen.

The controller is built to scale with operations ranging from small to large manufacturing production. Customizable part identification and flexible software allow the system to adapt as production needs change over time. User controls, integrated troubleshooting and embedded training resources are intended to simplify onboarding, while role-based permissions help manage access across operators and shifts.

FABTECH attendees will be able to see the system's gun management and recipe-handling capabilities firsthand.

Nordson Industrial Coating Solutions | nordson.com/powder | Booth S13000



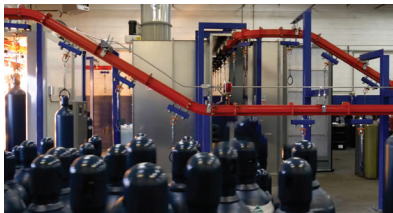
automotive facilities and industrial operations seeking to improve material flow and maximize floor space. Niko Conveyors operates as a U.S. distributor for Niko Helm Hellas, a Greece-based conveyor manufacturer.

Niko Conveyors | nikoconveyors.com | Booth S16011

Enclosed Track Conveyors Route Parts Through Finishing Lines in Tight Spaces

Pacline Conveyors (Mississauga, Canada) manufactures enclosed track overhead conveyor systems designed for industrial finishing operations and will display two product lines.

The Pac-Line is a compact, medium-capacity enclosed track conveyor intended for routing parts through powder coating, wet spray and ecoat processes. According to the company, its tight-radius curves and flexible layout options can help reduce the size of spray booths and ovens, making it suited for facilities adding or expanding a finishing line within limited floor space.



The Pac-Max is a heavy-duty enclosed track conveyor designed for larger, heavier parts, with a cross-shaped track profile that provides optimal load stability. Pacline positions the Pac-Max as a low-maintenance alternative to chain-on-edge conveyors for high-quality finishing lines. The conveyor supports inverted, slot sideways and overhead mounting orientations.

Pacline Conveyors | pacline.com | Booth S10060

High-Voltage, Low-Current Charging for Dry-on-Dry Powder Processes

Parker Ionics (Westland, Michigan) offers Super Pulse Power Advanced Corona Charging Technology, an innovation used in its powder coating units. The charging innovation addresses a common trade-off in dry-on-dry powder coating: maintaining transfer efficiency while operating at the low microamp outputs those processes require.

Dry-on-dry powder application works best at lower current levels than those typically generated at 100- or 120-kV gun outputs. Conventional approaches to reducing excess free ions each carry drawbacks.

Super Pulse Power uses time-tested electronic circuitry to deliver high-voltage corona charging at low current output, combining the efficiency benefit of high-voltage application with the current levels suited to dry-on-dry processes.

Parker Ionics | parkerionics.com | Booth S15015



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Manual, Automated Precision Pretreatment Equipment

PEM Inc.

(Mankato, Minnesota), a metal cleaning, pretreating and chemical application equipment provider, will display batch and automated pretreatment equipment at FABTECH 2026, with a focus on recent updates to its SprayLean in-line washer, which has received design improvements and new pump options.

PEM's booth will also represent its SprayWand and FinFlow product lines, which the company positions as options for shops looking to add pretreatment capacity, bring finishing in-house or expand existing services.

PEM Inc. | pemequip.com | Booth S11032



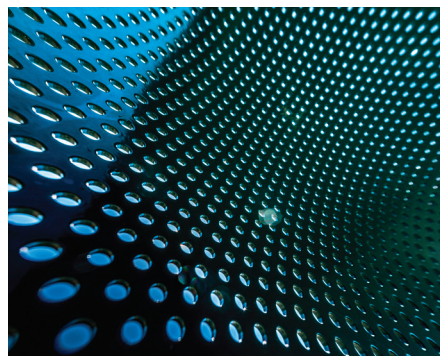
Powder Coating, Waterborne Primer Advances for Structural Steel and Edge Protection

PPG (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) presents two products aimed at structural steel and industrial powder coating applications.

Envirocron Extreme Protection Edge Powder Plus builds on PPG's first-generation high-edge powder formulation, retaining its corrosion protection characteristics while adding an improved, smoother finish. The product is designed to address edge coverage challenges in powder coating applications.

The second product, the Aquacron Waterborne Shop Primer (WSP) for structural steel, is positioned for use across climate conditions and offers rapid curing and a smooth finish. The primer delivers a combination of performance properties not available in existing waterborne primers.

PPG | ppg.com/industrialcoatings | Booth S10005



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Fabric-Based Airtight Doors for Paint Booths, Ovens and Blast Booths

RollSeal (Bremen, Alabama) manufactures custom environmental separation doors for industrial finishing applications and will demonstrate several models at FABTECH 2026. The family-owned company, founded in 1978, specializes in doors designed to provide airtight sealing between environments in facilities including paint booths, high-temperature cure ovens and blast booths.



Featured at the show will be paint booth doors, high-temperature oven doors and the company's new blast booth door model. All three feature RollSeal's patented three-layer fabric system and floating seal technology. According to the company, this design makes RollSeal doors the only certified airtight sealing solution in the industrial finishing market.

RollSeal | rollseal.net | Booth S15024

Rotary Bell Atomizer Series Addresses Automated, Highly Efficient Paint Application

Sames' (Plymouth, Michigan) Nanobell 8 Series of rotary bell atomizers is a three-model range designed to cover a broad spectrum of liquid coating in general industrial finishing.

The series includes the Nanobell 801, a non-electrostatic model suited for wood finishing applications, and high-performance electrostatic models 803 and 805. All three are designed for use in automated and robotic finishing systems and offer precise pattern control and reduced overspray. The Nanobell 8 Series can deliver paint savings of up to 40% compared to conventional application methods, and ensures high productivity, finishing quality and maximum transfer efficiency.

Sames | sames.com | Booth S18024



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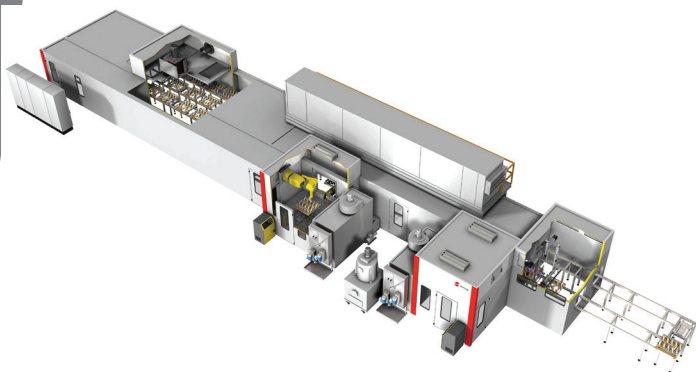


Custom Turnkey Coating Systems for Challenging Surface Applications

Sprimag Inc. (West Chester, Ohio) designs and builds custom, turnkey painting systems, surface coating systems and internal coating equipment for a range of industrial markets. The company serves automotive, aerospace, medical, general manufacturing, MRO and consumer products industries.

With more than 100 years of proven expertise, Sprimag's systems are engineered to address distinctive and challenging coating requirements. Its sales engineering team will be available to discuss spray coating applications.

Sprimag Inc. | sprimag.com | Booth S10014

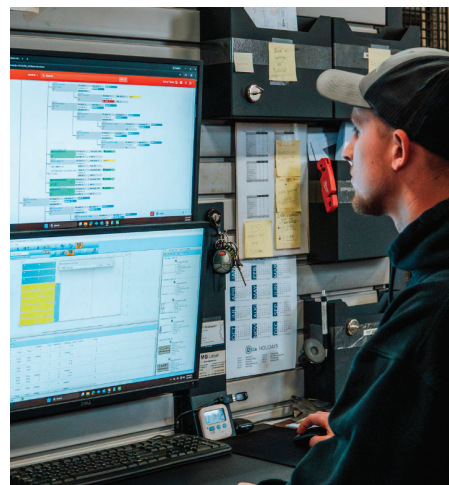


Automating Finishing Shop BOM Creation With AI-Powered Tool

Steelhead Technologies (Calumet, Michigan) has introduced AI BOM Builder, a tool within its cloud-based shop management platform that automates the creation of BOM from customer engineering drawings.

The tool analyzes submitted prints, creates assemblies and generates all required part numbers directly in Steelhead — without manual data entry by shop staff. The intended result is faster turnaround from print receipt to quoting, planning or production, along with a reduction in data entry errors.

Steelhead Technologies | gosteelhead.com | Booth S8858



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Battery-Powered Wireless Conveyor Carrier Handles Loads Up to 12,000 Pounds



Therma-Tron-X Inc. (TTX, Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin) highlights its Automated Conveyor Carrier System (ACC), a battery-powered, wireless material handling system designed for industrial finishing operations, traveling on simple I-beam tracks without the use of chains.

Each ACC system is custom designed to meet individual customer production requirements and can handle loads ranging from 10 to 12,000 lbs. Eliminating chains from the conveyor design reduces maintenance requirements and energy consumption.

TTX, a family-owned manufacturer with more than 55 years of experience, produces complete finishing systems including powder coating, electrocoat and liquid spray lines.

Therma-Tron-X Inc. | ttxinc.com | Booth S11000

Surface Treatment Chemical Supplier Emphasizes Service, Supply Reliability

Troy Chemical (Burton, Ohio) supplies surface treatment chemicals to manufacturers and will be available at FABTECH 2026 to discuss how its service and distribution model supports finishing operations.

The company operates three finished goods warehouses located across the U.S. and staffs qualified technical representatives who provide on-site support from order through application. Troy Chemical achieves more than 95% on-time shipping.

Troy Chemical | troychemical.com | Booth S12025



Gas Catalytic IR Technology Targets Faster Curing, Lower Energy Use

Titan-Catalytic (Bristol, Connecticut) manufactures gas catalytic infrared (IR) heaters, ovens and control systems for industrial finishing operations including powder coating, liquid finishing, thermoforming and drying. The company's IR technology works by delivering infrared energy directly to a coating rather than heating surrounding air, which improves transfer efficiency and produces more consistent curing results than conventional convection ovens.

Titan-Catalytic's systems incorporate ray tracing technology and precision controls to achieve uniform heat coverage across parts, resulting in higher-quality finishes, increased throughput and reduced labor and energy costs. In addition to heaters and ovens, the company offers controls, refurbishment services and turnkey system solutions.

Titan-Catalytic | titan-catalytic.com | Booth S16011



Thermoset Powder Coatings With Color Consistency, High-Performance Finishes

Vitracoat Inc. (Houston, Texas) offers a line of thermoset powder coatings designed to address application efficiency, color consistency and high-performance finish requirements across a range of manufacturing applications. The company's portfolio also includes architectural color offerings, with the company pointing to its R&D capabilities and North American production and distribution infrastructure as key enablers of its product development and service model.

Vitracoat describes its manufacturing footprint as one of the largest powder coating production facilities in the world, with locations across North America. The company emphasizes responsive service, an extensive stock color selection and flexible small-batch capabilities as differentiators for manufacturers seeking coating solutions across varying production volumes.

Vitracoat Inc. | vitracoat.com | Booth S13012





How to Protect Steel Parts From Rust Before Powder Coating

Q: We are just learning about the powder coating process and are preparing to invest in a new powder coating system. We have been told that we must get the part clean before powder coating and are exploring our options. We are also looking at chemical treatments to provide better adhesion and rust protection. All of our parts are fabricated of mild steel from 16 gauge to 1/4-inch plate. Are you aware of any uncomplicated pretreatment options that will work with powder coating and help to limit rust on steel surfaces with a lot of welds and complex shapes?

A: A good alkaline cleaner is usually a good place to start with cold rolled steel (CRS) that is relatively clean in the raw form. Your lighter gauges are a good fit for chemical treatment. It does a good job of breaking down organic rust inhibitors and similar soils.

Once a steel surface has been cleaned, it is desirable to add a conversion coating to protect from oxidation and to enhance bonding. Iron phosphate works well with powder but has modest corrosion resistance if the coating film gets scratched or damaged in some way. Zirconium oxide products can also enhance bonding and provide somewhat better corrosion resistance on different metals; some of the zirconium oxide products contain other metals such as copper or titanium and are good corrosion inhibitors. Zinc phosphate has very good corrosion resistance but it also requires waste treatment and would not be considered simple or environmentally desirable. Zinc will also require waste treatment where iron phosphate or zirconium may not need treatment in some locations.

When you get into the heavier plate steel and do welding using hot rolled steel (HRS), you should consider an abrasive

step to remove inorganic soils such as rust and scale. If you cut steel with a laser cutter, you will likely have to blast or grind to take the scale off the cut edge. Again, lower gauges using the right gas for the laser operation may not need abrasion, but heavier steel plate likely will.

One of the best options for corrosion resistance is the use of a powder primer, especially for products that will be used outdoors. Thoroughly clean the surface by chemical or mechanical cleaning before adding the primer. If you use a chemical cleaner, you should also use a conversion coating to render the surface nonreactive. The powder primer can contain zinc or not. A zinc-rich primer works very well if the surface is roughened by blasting. It is less effective if the surface is not blasted because the zinc will not develop the kind of cathodic contact needed to provide the sacrificial barrier as intended. With or without zinc, the powder primer will provide exceptional resistance to moisture penetration and a thicker film with better edge coverage. The primer does a great job of stopping the spread of rust.

If you are doing indoor steel products of light gauge, an alkaline cleaner with iron phosphate or zirconium will work fine. If you have to go outside, you should consider an enhanced zirconium, zinc phosphate or a powder primer. If you have a lot of inorganic soils, such as rust or mill scale, you should abrade the surface. ■■■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RODGER TALBERT has more than 30 years of experience in the powder coating industry.

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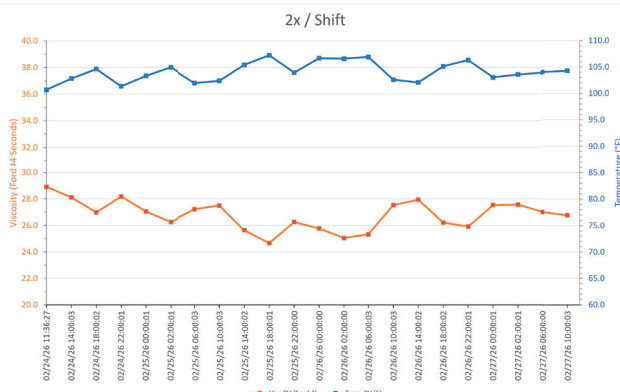
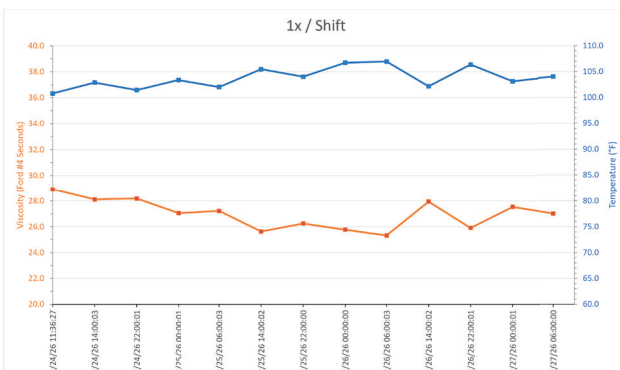
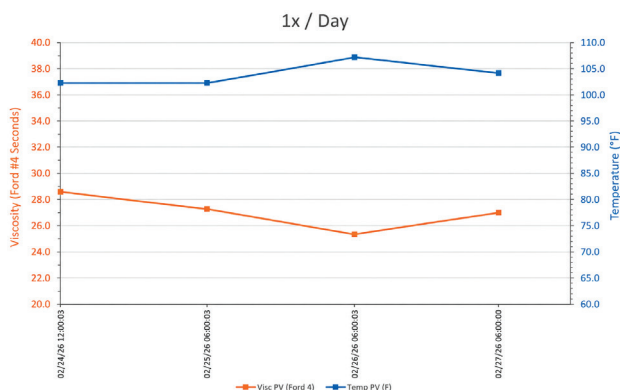
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Contrax moves to Grand Rapids, MI, October 21-22, 2026!
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The Measurement Rule Your Paint Shop Needs

In this age of AI, much discussion is focused on measurement parameters and how to ensure that the algorithm is being provided with accurate information. As it turns out, my electrical education informs my thinking about measuring and reporting fluid process data like temperature, viscosity, pH, conductivity and level, just to name a few.



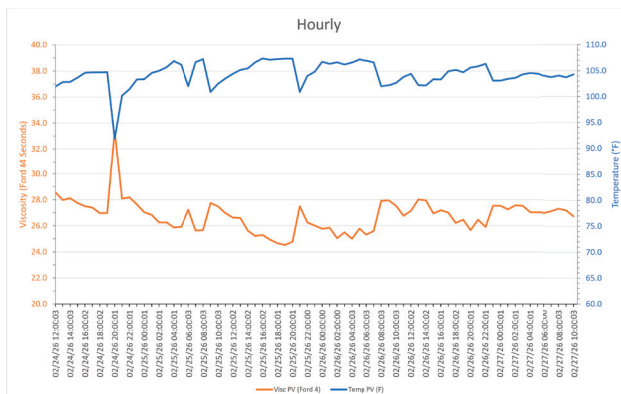
▲ **FIGURE 1.** Data resolution improvement by increasing measurement from one time/day to two times/shift.

Source (All Graphs) | Saint Clair Systems

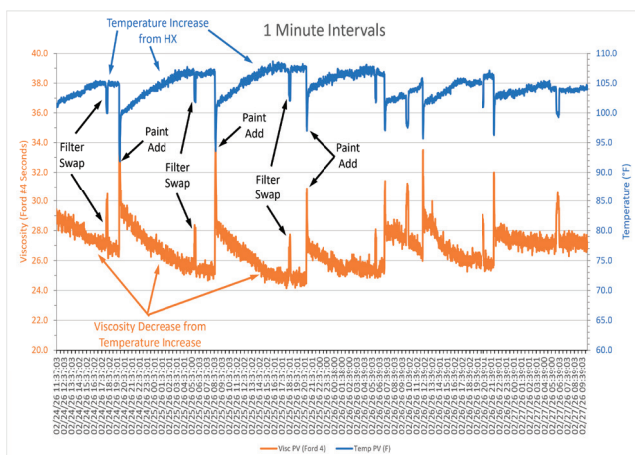


As an example, in 1928, Bell Labs engineer Henry Nyquist published a paper on telegraph transmission theory that would eventually reshape how every industry thinks about measurement. His finding, later formalized as the “Nyquist Rate,” holds that to faithfully capture a signal, you must sample it at least twice as fast as its highest meaningful event frequency. Sample too slowly, and fast-moving events do not just go unrecorded — they can appear to vanish entirely, or worse, masquerade as something they are not. For a paint viscosity control loop, this is not an abstract idea, it is the difference between catching a process drift before it reaches the booth and discovering it as a rejected part.

In practice, most paint shops settle on one of three measurement cadences: once per day, once per shift or twice per shift. Each represents a tradeoff between labor cost and risk. A single daily reading is the cheapest to collect. Once per shift adds visibility into whether viscosity shifted between crews. Twice per shift, with one reading at shift start and another near the midpoint, narrows the blind spot a bit, as shown in Fig. 1 (at left).



▲ **FIGURE 2.** Hourly measurement frequency.



▲ **FIGURE 3.** Measurement at 1-minute intervals.

Though all three show the inverse relationship between viscosity and temperature, there is still much being missed. Even if we measure every hour, as shown in Fig. 2, we still don't get the whole story. As Nyquist anticipated, this can interfere with our ability to make informed decisions about our process.

If instead, we sample every minute, as shown in Fig. 3, process events that were only faintly suggested by our hourly measurements become clear.

The right sampling rate is never a fixed number; it depends entirely on what each measurement is meant to control. If viscosity must be maintained to ensure finish quality outcomes, the relevant “signal” is the time it takes to paint a single part or rack. A booth cycle rate of one rack per minute demands a measurement interval measured in seconds — daily or per-shift sampling cannot catch an event that comes and goes before the next reading is even due. If, instead, the viscosity loop exists to compensate for solvent evaporation in a holding tank, the underlying process moves far slower, often over hours, and a longer interval is not just acceptable but appropriate — oversampling a slow process adds cost without adding insight.

Nyquist's insight was about signals and noise, but the lesson translates directly to the plant floor: Know the frequency of what you are trying to control, then sample at double that rate or faster. Anything slower is a guess. ■■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MICHAEL BONNER is the VP of engineering & technology for Saint Clair Systems Inc., a supplier of process viscosity and temperature control equipment for industrial fluid dispensing systems.

CONTACT: viscosity.com



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Salt Spray Versus Cyclic Corrosion Testing: What's the Difference?

Q: I am very familiar with salt spray requirements, but I have been hearing a lot about cyclic corrosion testing and requirements related to automotive specs. Can you explain the difference and why cyclic corrosion seems to be so important to automotive OEMs?

A: Salt spray testing has long served as a common method to evaluate the corrosion resistance of coatings and surface treatments. Today, however, automotive OEMs are increasingly emphasizing cyclic corrosion testing (CCT) when approving coatings, chemistries and finished components. This shift has left applicators wondering why cyclic corrosion testing has become so important and wanting to understand how it differs from traditional salt spray testing. It's worth noting that while both methods evaluate corrosion resistance, they use different procedures and often produce different results.

Overview of salt spray testing

The salt spray test involves placing test parts or panels into a chamber and exposing them to a controlled, continuous, dense salt fog at a fixed temperature to evaluate the relative corrosion resistance of the coating or part.

Commonly performed according to ASTM B117 and other industry specifications, salt spray testing is widely used because it is relatively simple, repeatable and cost-effective. Automotive requirements can range anywhere from 72 hours to more than 1,000 hours depending on the coating system and performance expectations.

A limitation of salt spray testing is that it does not accurately simulate the real-world environment automotive parts are subject to during their service life. As previously mentioned, parts in salt spray testing are exposed to a continuous spray of salt fog at a controlled temperature. While this constant moisture and temperature certainly accelerate corrosion, it does not reflect the changing environmental conditions vehicle components are in contact with such as temperature swings, dry periods, rain, road salt, humidity, freezing and thawing, etc.

As a result, salt spray performance and real-world performance do not always correlate. In fact, data has shown coatings that perform exceptionally well in salt spray testing may not necessarily deliver the same level of protection when exposed to actual service conditions. This inconsistency is one of the main reasons automotive OEMs have adopted CCT when validating and approving new coatings and chemistries for their finished parts.

Nevertheless, the test does provide a practical benchmark for evaluating corrosion resistance and comparing the performance of different coating systems. As a result, salt

spray testing remains a common requirement for Production Part Approval Process (PPAP) submissions and quality control programs throughout the automotive supply chain.

Understanding cyclic corrosion testing

CCT was developed to more closely simulate the environmental conditions encountered by automotive components during real-world use. The process involves placing sample parts or panels in a cyclic corrosion test chamber that can alternate between multiple environmental conditions. The chamber precisely automates these conditions according to a programmed schedule, thereby ensuring consistency and repeatability. Many cyclic corrosion chambers are also designed to store multiple test profiles for various automotive OEMs.

A typical automotive test may include 24-hour cycles that are repeated over several weeks. Depending on the OEM specification, testing may range from 40-100 cycles, representing approximately 960-2,400 hours of exposure. Some programs may run for six to 16 weeks before completion.

Exposing the coated parts to these alternating periods of higher and lower temperatures, humidity, salt spray and dry-off cycles helps replicate the natural product corrosion that occurs over time. The outcomes allow engineers to assess potential weaknesses in material design and develop strategies to improve product resilience against corrosion.

For this reason, many automotive OEMs now use CCT as a critical part of their coating approval and qualification processes, recognizing its ability to predict field performance better than traditional continuous salt spray testing.

Moving toward real-world corrosion performance

Salt spray testing remains an important tool and will continue to play a significant role in quality control, PPAP testing and spec compliance. However, performance of coatings in the real world is what matters most, and the automotive industry has recognized CCT as a preferred method for more accurately reproducing changing environmental conditions. Therefore, suppliers seeking approval for coatings, whether it be for plating systems, passivates, sealers, topcoats or lubricants, will increasingly find CCT included in qualification requirements. ■■■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

MARK SCHARIO, CEF, CFS, serves as chief technology officer for Columbia Chemical.

CONTACT: columbiachemical.com

Smarter Masking Solutions for Coating and Finishing Challenges

Q: I've seen many off-the-shelf masking solutions that seem like they might work for my process. Yet I hear a lot of advice that custom masking solutions often yield better results. How do I choose?

A: Manufacturers operating in coating and finishing environments face a variety of challenges that may impact product quality, process efficiency and production consistency. From securing parts during processing to protecting critical threads and maintaining proper airflow, these discrete issues often signal an opportunity for novel solutions.

Many product innovations begin with a simple question: What is the customer challenge, and how can we create a product that will provide a solution and, at the same time, offer a process improvement? In many cases there is no off-the-shelf solution and a purpose-built design tailored to the specific application is the right path forward. These products can then be offered to other customers either as stock solutions in a range of sizes or in a customized variation.

For example, in response to recurring challenges, Custom Fabricating & Supplies developed several products in response to customer feedback and real-world production requirements: the hook lock, threaded plug and vent plug.

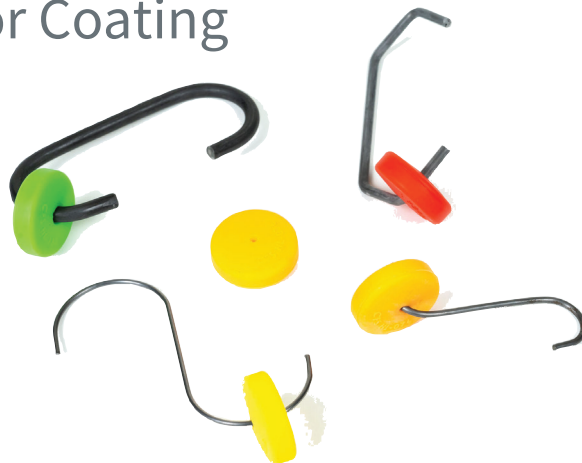
Securing parts with confidence

Coating small parts, whether through powder coating or electrocoating, can present unique challenges. Since each part must be individually hung for full coverage and grounding, parts can come off the hook during a wash cycle or float off during immersion, creating unforeseen costs and rework.

CFS' hook lock is a solution for securing parts without affecting coverage or grounding. Made from reusable, high-temperature silicone, hook locks securely hold parts in place, preventing loss and improving safety by stopping parts from falling off overhead lines. Sturdy and easy to use, these parts withstand temperatures up to 600°F (315°C). Available in various diameters — and color coded for easy identification — they can be used in most finishing operations.

Protecting critical threads

Threaded openings frequently require protection from coatings, contaminants and overspray. The silicone threaded plug was designed for threaded holes when a watertight seal is needed. With a sturdy design, this part withstands pressure buildup; a hex-head ensures easy installation and removal. It is designed for high-temperature applications and available for fine or coarse threads, rated to 600°F (315°C). The part is intended to deliver parts with clean, functional threads while supporting efficient processing and minimizing the need for secondary cleanup operations.



Hook locks secure parts in place during coating operations.

Source | Custom Fabricating & Supplies

Managing airflow and pressure

Plugging or capping parts that are connected to a large cavity is challenging due to the air pressure that builds up during dry-off and cure oven bake cycles. To address this problem, CFS developed a two-piece plug design that acts as a one-way vent. The vent allows air to escape as needed while keeping all wash and coating out.

Designed for ecoating, the vent plug offers a secure, sealed cover for a cavity, with a vent to relieve air pressure. If air is not escaping, the vent seals itself, helping to safeguard against leaks. The outer part of the design works like a standard plug and can be custom-made to fit specific part geometries. This part can also be used in powder coating and wet spray and is rated to 600°F (315°C).

Solutions shaped by market needs

Each of these solutions was created in response to challenges faced by manufacturers every day. As manufacturing processes become more sophisticated, the demand for specialized surface protection solutions continues to grow. By listening to customer needs and developing solutions with specific applications in mind, manufacturers continue to improve process performance, overcome production challenges and achieve more consistent results, helping to protect the quality of the finished product.

The best advice? Consult your masking supplier whenever you have a problem or challenge — they can help you assess your needs and guide you to the right solution whether it's a problem that's been encountered before or something unique to your process. ■■■



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BRIAN ASIK is senior vice president of Custom Fabricating & Supplies. He is responsible for directing sales, product development and manufacturing operations.

CONTACT: customfabricate.com

There is No Future for AI Without Industrial AI

Physical AI, the manifestation of artificially intelligent systems in physical assets, starts at the line and the time for finishers to act is now.



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► I've been saying for at least three years now that the real future of AI is physical AI — that being the manifestation of artificially intelligent systems in physical assets. ChatGPT, Claude, Co-pilot, Perplexity and MetaAI are all great, but they're nothing compared to what's coming in the physical realm.

I've been saying it — but it seems few have been interested in listening.

At least until recently. Last year, support finally arrived when Jensen Huang, founder and CEO of Nvidia, delivered his keynote address at the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. Huang's company produces advanced graphics processing units, central processing units and software that comprise the foundation of computing power necessary for AI, and things are going well for Huang. Nvidia is the world's largest company by enterprise value at \$4.72 trillion in market capitalization, as of the date of this writing. When he speaks, people listen. And listen they did.

Huang summarized the incredible pace at which AI has advanced. He started with perception AI, when AI began understanding images and words and sounds. This morphed to generative AI, which had the ability to generate images and text and sounds on its own.

Enter agentic AI — that is, AI that can see on its own, think on its own, reason on its own and act on its own. He then said, "And then the next phase, which we'll talk about tonight, physical AI." Indeed, the physical AI revolution is here.

The good news for finishers? Advanced manufacturing will be ground zero for physical AI. That's right, the next and most important phase of AI is advanced manufacturing. We will be the center point!

Because the world relies on manufacturers, because the economy turns on our ability to produce what consumers want, when they want it, where they want it and at a price they can afford, physical AI will transform our market first.

A little context on physical AI. I had a front row seat to the present and future of physical AI a year ago this month, in August 2025 when I traveled to China with my friend Todd Wanek, CEO of Ashley Furniture. Over the course of six days we visited 26 technology companies in four cities.

What did we see? Hundreds of drones over Shenzhen delivering packages to waiting consumers, eight companies designing and manufacturing humanoid robots for myriad applications, manufacturing lines loaded with smart sensors and devices feeding data lakes and MCP servers facilitating

agentic inference, automated storage and retrieval systems monitoring inventory levels in real time — all being fed to highly advanced supervisory control and data acquisition systems, material requirements planning and enterprise resource planning platforms.

The process-visualization blew me away. In one case at an appliance manufacturing plant, the control room that monitored the plant was adorned by hulking video screens with an army of engineers and analysts at the ready to assess and resolve any issue adversely affecting production.

Back here in the States, most in manufacturing are familiar with advanced manufacturing behemoth Rockwell Automation whose programmable logic controllers, electric motor drives, human-machine interfaces and controls software are ubiquitous in American manufacturing. The chairman and CEO of this \$8 billion company, Blake Moret, recently stopped by the TechEd Podcast studio to talk with me about how physical AI will transform our space.

His company is investing more than \$2 billion in its U.S. manufacturing operations in the coming years, half in a brand new plant in New Berlin, Wisconsin, and he shared in detail about what the factory of the future will look like.

What message do coaters need to hear loud and clear? In the age of physical AI, Moret highlighted the importance of edge technologies, domain expertise and beginning the AI transformation at the molecular level of manufacturing technology. The molecular level. At the point of production or processing. For finishers, this means the starting point for the advent of physical AI in manufacturing is at the finishing line, at the processing tank, at the curing oven, at the loading station.

Physical AI starts at the line. Here, smart sensors with embedded intelligence and the ability to communicate will monitor and adjust every last variable in the finishing process. Here, AI-driven industrial robots with integrated vision systems will autonomously load and unload parts in lot sizes as small as one. Here, autonomous mobile robots will deliver raw parts to the line and transport finished ones to the next operation.

Avoid the temptation to be overwhelmed or to wait. AI can be the great equalizer between companies large and small and for budgets rich and frugal. Those who start today will win tomorrow. ■■

FINISHING INDEX



COMPONENTS SCORECARD

	Change vs	
	Month Ago	Year Ago
Supplier Deliveries	▲	▲
New Orders	▲	▲
Production	▲	▲
Employment	▲	▲
Backlog	▲	▲
Exports	▼	▼

FUTURE BUSINESS INDEX



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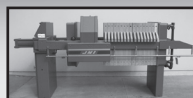
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