

# Manufacturers, dealers trade ideas

By Gerald Hawley  
Staff writer

**G**ETTING AUTOMOTIVE suppliers in the loop: that's what automobile manufacturers and dealers hope to accomplish with the North American International Auto Show's Industry Trade Days.

Industry Trade Days, a two-day program (running Thursday-Friday, Jan. 10-11), is designed to give auto suppliers worldwide a chance to be more involved in the largest auto show in North America, said Daniel Hayes, Detroit Auto Dealers Association executive vice president.

The schedule allows supplier companies to conduct a variety of specialized business functions: private showings of new capabilities and products for customers and prospects, a focus for company sales and marketing meetings, a location for professional association meetings.

"We're talking about two basic things. First, it will allow the suppliers to see the show without the enormous crowds," Hayes said.

In an un rushed atmosphere, suppliers will be able to see the finished products they had a part in making, and perhaps take pride in their accomplishments.

Second, it will give the auto suppliers an opportunity to communicate with the original equipment manufacturers. There are no formal sessions between the auto manufacturers and the suppliers.

The intent of the trade days is to give the suppliers and manufacturers an "opportunity" to get together, Hayes said.

"Basically, we're offering a place where everyone will be, but there isn't an organized (other than an auto dealers-sponsored dinner party) session," he said. "I imagine there will be a lot of inviting, a lot of meeting going on that people will set up, but we're not doing it."

"We don't know all the answers yet. This is our first attempt at something like this," he said, adding that show sponsors will get together afterward to evaluate how it went and talk to suppliers.

TRADE DAYS is unlike any other event in the world. There have been similar events at European auto shows, but these have been organized by the suppliers themselves. Auto shows in Europe, Hayes said, are sponsored by the manufacturers, not dealers.

For many years, automobile manufacturers have been striving to get dealers "into the loop" so they'll be more involved in the sales of cars, said auto show co-chairman Gordon Stewart, owner of Gordon Chevrolet in Garden City.

"Industry Trade Days is a very big concept in Europe," Stewart said. "They're used to help the auto supplier industry get a better footing."

Automobile manufacturers have been cultivating a better relationship with auto dealers for several years. But auto suppliers, the tens of thousands of small companies that sell the auto companies everything from the front-end sensors that activate air bags to the little rubber stoppers used to plug rust treatment holes, have been left out of the loop.

These suppliers, for whom quality must be as great a concern as it is for the auto companies themselves, need to be brought into the fold to see what's important and where they can improve, Stewart said.

"This provides them with an opportunity to establish better communication with their customer, the auto industry."

THE AUTO show also provides the ideal forum for making announcements about new products and directions. Media from all over the world attend the auto show, Stewart said.

Paul Boudreau, public affairs director for Allied Signal, automotive sector, in Southfield, said anything that encourages a better relationship between the suppliers and the original equipment manufacturers is welcome.

Auto suppliers were always interested in establishing closer ties with their customers. "And as we move into the future, there is going to be a need for us to be partners," Boudreau said.

He said auto suppliers and automotive companies have already established a close working relationship over the past decade. But more and more, the suppliers and the auto makers must work together to get the cost and quality "right after."

Allied Signal serves seven automotive core businesses: braking systems for passenger cars and trucks, braking systems for medium and heavy trucks, friction materials, filters, spark plugs, charge air systems and safety restraints.

Allied Signal markets its products under the Bendix, Fram, Autolite and Garrett brand names.

not, but the lack of a forum for the industry limited its usefulness. The auto show's "primary reason for being has been to show cars," Boudreau said.

"I think the issue is what will people do with the opportunity."

What specific opportunities the Industry Trade Days may provide, Boudreau said he is not sure. Since this is the first North American Industry Trade Days associated with an auto show, attendees will have to see what opportunities it may provide.

Boudreau added that auto

suppliers, once Industry Trade Days is over, will probably suggest ways to improve the event.

Industry Trade Days, as he understands it, will also give auto suppliers access to auto dealers. "We haven't had a lot of that."

There are several reasons suppliers would be interested in a closer relationship with dealers, Boudreau said. For one, the auto dealers need information about the products auto suppliers offer as options.

"What's anti-lock brakes? How do they work?" he said. Dealers have to

know what the options are if they are going to sell them, he said.

TIMOTHY HEALEY, sales and marketing director for the Auburn Hills-based Ervin Automotive Products, a division of Takata Inc., said his company has several reasons for attending Industry Trade Days.

First and foremost, Ervin Automotive is assembling two teams of its engineering and marketing personnel to evaluate competitors' products. The teams, with marketing and engineering members, will have an opportunity to see what's going on

in the world. Ervin Automotive supplies interior trim products like shifter boots, visors, storage compartments, consoles and arm rests.

The trade days is an ideal time for closer inspection, because the automotive suppliers won't have to compete with the crowds of the general public.

"We've been associated with the auto show for a number of years, but this will allow us to put a little more quality time in," Healey said. The second reason Ervin Automotive is interested in going to

the Industry Trade Days is to promote a joint venture the company is working on with American Sunroof Corp., the downriver automotive supplier and concept car manufacturer owned by Heinz Prechter.

Representatives from the two companies will be in attendance to present news of the venture to the world media, and also to meet with various industry representatives to explain the venture.

The automotive supply market, Healey said, is truly a global industry.

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G. Stewart

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