

# Envelope from page 1C

# Lopez strife leads to bigger questions

Twenty-three employees — sales, billing and support staff — work out of Birmingham, about 70 in Angola, Ind.

Mahler, aware of the potential effect of technology on the envelope business, isn't pushing any panic buttons.

"Mail is still a significant part of most businesses," he said. "There's more home buying, catalog buying, more communication to the individual at home. That means sending correspondence."

"Using Visa or credit cards means more envelopes to confirm billing. Direct mail is still a strong means of getting a communication to somebody."

"We still have to keep files for medical records," Mahler added. Then there's envelopes for shipping parts in various manufacturing processes.

But beyond that, Mahler figures that Wolf supplies more than envelopes to its customers.

"What we try to figure out is what they're trying to accomplish," he said. "Some might be

looking at reducing inventory levels, close a warehouse, someone to distribute envelopes to all branch offices."

"Sooner or later, you can't get envelopes any cheaper than costs," Mahler said. "Then we focus on the service aspect. Design of the envelope. Maybe we can figure out ways to save paper, reduce costs."

Thomas J. Hector, who recently joined Wolf as general sales manager from the financial services industry, picked up on that theme.

"He and I agree, based on my sales experience, that we can't operate on price alone," Hector said. "Our thrust is to elevate the company to a higher level in terms of quality production, delivery and a consultative approach with the customer."

"If you look at the volume the post office is processing, that's not decreasing. Fax and electronic measures in a lot of ways are supplemental to what envelopes can provide," Hector said.



**DAN MCCOSH**

he left his GM job for a far richer post at Volkswagen.

It was no secret that Lopez's relations with GM's suppliers and a significant portion of the GM establishment made Ross Ferot look like a Dale Carnegie graduate by comparison.

Still, the allegations that he was last seen exiting the GM building with cartons of top-secret GM documents seemed a bit much. Lopez apparently thinks so too, and responded by filing a libel suit against GM, while vehemently denying the charge.

Whether or not those cardboard boxes contained the alleged GM secrets or merely a couple of old bowling trophies, the bricksbats being tossed at Lopez have something more than symbolic overtones.

Lopez was, after all, for a short time the symbol of GM's promised renaissance, the guy who was going to turn the battleship around (as former GM Chairman Roger Smith used to say), and do it overnight.

Actually, what Roger Smith said was that you can't turn this battleship around overnight.

But I digress.

In fact, Lopez was in no position to turn GM around, overnight or otherwise, all by himself. But he was in a position to shake things up. He started by throwing out old supplier contracts and going after the lowest bidder. This is, of course, the way old-time purchasing agents used to operate back before they took courses in how the Japanese do it. In the old days, the response to getting a

contract canceled was to take the purchasing agent deer hunting at your lodge up North.

Lopez apparently didn't like to hunt, so he became known as one grimly determined to get what he wanted — namely cheap parts.

This doesn't exactly seem like the kind of strategy that needs to be carried out of the GM building in the dead of night.

On the other hand, GM set a precedent when it prosecuted a clerk in its photo lab for stealing a picture of the Saturn car and selling it to Automobile magazine a couple of months before GM began paying Automobile magazine to run ads for Saturn which in-

cluded the same picture.

The Lopez saga now seems headed for German courts, guaranteeing a spectacle that will make two of the largest auto organizations in the world look pretty silly.

One could ask if this is anyway to run an auto company. Then again, it seems like it was only yesterday that wearing your watch on your right wrist — Lopez notion of signifying that the times were changing — seemed like a pretty good idea.

Dan McCosh is automotive editor of Popular Science magazine.

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