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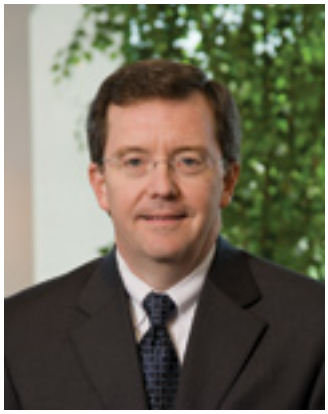

While it is difficult to determine how quickly the overall economy will improve, it's clear that improvement will come—*but perhaps only for those who understand the structural changes that have occurred and must now be dealt with.* As the writer William Arthur Ward noted: "The pessimist complains about the wind; the optimist expects it to change; the realist adjusts the sails."

The challenge for many process-industry end users today is to compete in a more constrained marketplace than in the past, and at the same time improve profitability and grow. The focus has shifted from survival, or just getting through the downturn, to making the real business changes needed to compete effectively as the economy improves. That requires a realist's view of what has to be adjusted to meet today's specific needs.

For many companies, the competitive difference will be in how they address plant performance (and, specifically, how to improve reliability and productivity). The difficulty is that these goals require a longer-term view than many companies take these days. The real improvements start with long-term planning in how to meet reliability and productivity goals, and improve safety and sustainability initiatives—*not just because they're the right things to do, but because they drive long-term performance*. For the past 125 years, the A.W. Chesterton Company has worked directly with our customers to help them operate more reliably, efficiently and economically. Our focus has been to increase the competitiveness of our customers by continuously improving their plant performance and, more importantly, by providing them the type of knowledge that will help them improve.

How can product and service providers like Chesterton help? By supplying programs and services directly related to the plant areas that need improvement or that make a big impact on the overall operations of the facility. In process plants, that will often be related to reducing energy or raw material usage, boosting plant output or improving compliance. Process-water- and energy-reduction programs can have great impact on improved plant performance. Based on practical experience gained from working in process plants around the world, suppliers like Chesterton can offer "best practice" knowledge to help identify where there is a real return on implementing those types of efficiency efforts. By reviewing current plant practices and reducing process waste, there can be substantial cost savings and improvements in meeting compliance

goals.

Interestingly, by looking at plant safety or sustainability goals and compliance data—*and the issues that arise daily to affect them*
—we can usually identify many of the real drivers to lower plant efficiencies and productivity. Armed with that information, we can target specific processes and equipment to address and improve, along with the needed products and support to help with the implementation.

Going forward, meeting the end users' challenge of effectively competing and growing in the years to come will require them to look critically at their internal processes, and tap into the knowledge that key suppliers can bring to help identify and implement improvements. By addressing reliability, safety and sustainability issues, significant positive impacts can be made in the area of plant productivity and performance. Finding the right partners with the appropriate knowledge and experience is key—*not just for survival, but for ongoing profitability and success*
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