



‘We compliment and not compete with the IT giants’



Ajit Joshi, Vice President of Product Lifecycle Management (PLM) Solutions Business Unit, Geometric, has been a part of the company for the past nine years, during which he has handled various roles and responsibilities. In 2000, Geometric forayed into the PDM segment under Ajit’s leadership. In 2003, he was appointed as Vice President, Software Delivery, to head the consolidated PLM service offerings in the areas of CAD, PDM and Collaboration. Since April 2006, Ajit is the Vice President - PLM Solutions Business Unit, with a charter to strengthen the PLM footprint of Geometric in the industrial customer segment. Ajit holds BTech from IIT Mumbai, and MS from Auburn University, USA. In addition to this, he holds a gold medal in Post Graduate Diploma in Marketing Management from Symbiosis Institute of Business Management, Pune. His areas of specialisation include business management, customer relationship management and delivery management (capitalisation). In this interview with **Archana Tiwari-Nayudu**, he talks in depth about PLM software suite and Geometric’s journey in this era of cut-throat competition. Get hands-on information from the PLM expert himself through this interview. Excerpts...



Take us through your journey so far...

We started in 1984 as a part of the electronic business equipment division of Godrej and Boyce and at that time our focus was on developing the CAD/CAM products. During those days, we came up with products that were potentially competent with AutoDesk but were basically technology-oriented. We later realised that knowing only the technology was not enough to sell software. We also needed to know things like product management, marketing, sales etc. What helped us, later on, is the fact that we understood what it takes to develop such products and also the pain areas of the customer - what is it that they are looking for? And after understanding all these aspects, we re-created our product offerings according to customer requirements.

In a recent analysis of the global engineering design services markets, Frost & Sullivan awarded Geometric with the 2008 Frost & Sullivan Emerging Design Services Company of the Year. The award recognises Geometric's consistent revenue growth rate, global engineering delivery network capability that delivers significant value to customers, balanced vision to ensure long-term market sustenance and strategic partnerships with product lifecycle management (PLM) and enterprise resource planning (ERP) global leaders for both product development and providing services.

Geometrics came into existence with the philosophy of complementing and not competing with the big players in the IT in manufacturing arena and it has used its positioning to its advantage.

You said you have studied the customer pain areas, tell us about it...

We got to know what customers want and in what form. We then inculcated our expertise and skill into making an offering that the customers wanted. Then we started working with companies like SolidWorks. We started making products for them and by that time it matched with the outsourcing and offshoring wave, and thus, we became the de-facto choice of offshore for PLM. Since then, we have been developing PLM products for many companies.

The three big leaders of the PLM products today are the PTC, the Dassault Systems and Siemens PLM. Then there are companies like SolidWorks, which now is a part of Dassault,

Autodesk and MNC software. We have had a long working relationship right from the late 1980s onwards with many companies, and today, many of their new features, ideas, and architecture are conceptualised by Geometric. Though we started off with developing products for these companies, we also knew that we had the core competence to develop our own products. The hitch was that if we do develop products similar to them, then we'll be competing with the biggies of the industry and that would have no merit. Hence, we started developing products, which would complement the existing products. Thus, customers also derive additional benefits like productivity, optimisation etc. This is another aspect of our offering, building products, which plug with PLM ecosystem, and the biggest growing area in recent times, has been providing services around this product. PLM is not like plug and play; a customer cannot just buy, install and see the miracle happening in front of him. It has to be properly deployed into the customer's context, i.e., it is customised according to the customer's request. The main focus and growth area for Geometric is not only limited to making technologically- advanced products, but also deriving business benefits out of it.



What is your strategy to succeed and survive in this competitive market?

The reason why we are the leading system integrated company in this space is because, we started off really early, and the kind of footprint that we have, the relationship we share with companies, the expertise that we have are unique. You won't find any other organisation that works so closely with Dassault, Siemens, and other IT giants. These are all big names and so many other mid-range and niche players we also work with. We always try to stay ahead of the curve and then manage to define and re-define the market. One way in which we did this recently, was by continuously expanding our go-to-market model. Earlier, our go-to-market model was focussed on our partners, but since the last 18 months or so, we are going directly to the industrial customers. Eventually the users of PLM are industrial customers. Earlier, they were traditional companies like automotive, aerospace etc. Now there are new sectors like retail, apparel, fashion and we are approaching all of them directly.

What is your take on the Indian market?

Our Indian footprint is relatively small and our major market is overseas, for instance, the US and Europe. Our market here is less than 5 per cent, which is almost negligible. In India also we have two specific segments, one being all multinational companies who are setting up their operations in India and we have been working very closely with them; and the second one, the native Indian companies who want to compete globally. For any customer; be it Indian or overseas, PLM is something that is always treated as very specific and a niche solution. Now, gradually the decision-making and visibility has been elevated from the head of design to CIO, CEO and CFO level because PLM is not just a technology solution, but a business solution as well. Last year, we invested in two new practices - manufacturing IT and industrial controls and automation. Since then our solutions and packages have gathered tremendous fractions in the market. For the last 18 months, we have been promoting and trying to occupy the thought leaders space in extended PLM.

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engineering, it has to go beyond into the downstream operations, particularly manufacturing and at the shopfloor. We invested seriously in building these practices. PLM is just not about design but has links to the manufacturing world as well. That has always been Geometric's endeavour and this is our core area of competence.

Do you think India is a cost-competitive market?
Absolutely! Indian customers are world-



class customers and their thought process is completely different. There are examples everywhere of how Indian companies are aspiring to take on the world; there are acquisitions, take-overs, investments in R&D etc. So yes, the Indians are demanding customers and very tech-savvy and also have a good business mind. They understand the nuances of the business and the technology in depth. On the contrary, overseas customers would not go too much deeper into the technology. Today, the business environment is becoming very complex. The suppliers are somewhere, the vendors elsewhere, what is more important is to know how they all collaborate. The collaboration at each stage of product design, product launch, manufacturing, servicing, retirement, constitutes the entire product life-cycle. First step is conceptualisation of a product, then comes visualisation, designing, engineering and manufacturing process and lastly, making spare parts for that product, which should be available for some time. Eventually, after sometime the product will get outdated and this would end the product cycle.

What is the impact of globalisation on your business?

It is very positive; I'll elaborate with an example. We were working with a tyre manufacturing company and our primary objective was to cut down the time of designing a tyre by 30 per cent, so we worked closely with them, mapped all the technological processes and we actually re-architected the process from serial engineering to concurrent engineering. In concurrent engineering, there is continuous self-correction, so you can get feedback instantly. Thus, we changed their technology landscape and they got 35 per cent reduction in the design time. Thus, globalisation brings in capacity and talent. On the other hand, if you don't leverage it properly, it can create inefficiency and PLM is a complete fit in that context. Globalisation and the imperatives of innovation are driving engineering and manufacturing companies to move towards fully integrated PLM systems in order to enable seamless collaboration and information management.

What according to you is the reason for SMEs not being techno-savvy?

According to me, it is a combination of cost and

a mindset hindrance. When I say this, I do not mean only the SMEs of India, but globally also. SMEs have to be cost-conscious if they have to deliver value. SMEs always desire quick win and if they do not have a product that shows quick wins, they will not have the patience to wait and invest and then see the results after three to four years. Today, many of the PLM products have specific offerings for these SMEs. Some of them are light-weight products and some are quick deploying.

PLM is maturing from its original role of engineering. Please enlighten us about the same.

PLM earlier was focussed on a very niche envelope like in some corner of head of design and it was considered a technology solution. But today, it is seen as a business objective. Also, the visibility and return of investment has gone to CIO, CFO and CEO level. Thus, it is not restricted to technology and engineering alone. There is now a business objective to it.

What is the outcome of the report titled 'Integrating the PLM Ecosystem', an industry research by Geometric and Aberdeen Group?

The main reasons for conducting this report is to understand the PLM and make product development process much more efficient. Another reason is that when the product is designed and goes for manufacturing, then they want to make that process more efficient. The benefit that they



get is they are able to save tremendous amount on the development of product as well the product cost. Time to volume, time to market are all benefits of a very efficient PLM.

PLM is not being implemented in engineering alone; it has been taken to quality, supplier management levels and is now moving from engineering to enterprise level.

What are your policies to mark your presence in India?

First of all, we are partnering with all different vendors to help them take their solutions to India. Secondly, we have to strengthen our sales force in India. Right now we have only one, so we need to expand our go-to-market channels. But we are confident that whatever solutions we have, they will all cater to the Indian market. 🚫

