

A working day in the life of Wendy Bennett

Wendy Bennett is Sales and Marketing Director of investment casting specialist, Lost Wax Developments, which recently won the CMF Company Achievement 2005 Award



Wendy Bennett receiving the Cast Metals Federation 'Best of British' Company Achievement 2005 Award

Diverse - That is the best way to describe my working day. It certainly is true that no two days are alike at LWD. In fact in the space of five minutes I can jump from being the Sales and Marketing Director to the Tea Girl, and I wouldn't have it any other way. Lost Wax was set up by our Chairman John Bennett in 1977 with the aim of providing quality castings using cutting edge technology and this position has remained constant in an ever changing industry. At times we have felt that we were running to stand still, but these are exciting times at LWD and it feels good to be involved.

At the end of the nineties things looked bleak for the industry. Every journal brought tales of another foundry closing, how, we wondered would we stay afloat with so many slow boats heading for China and India?

Again that word Diverse - so many avenues opened up to us in the next few years, that it is hard to feel anything but positive. We don't have 'Key Accounts' at LWD. Every customer is important and treated with the same courteous attention to detail; indeed no project is too big or too small for us to undertake. We pride ourselves on being involved every step of the way with the customer, from the initial design of a casting to the final finished product.

Things are certainly looking good at the moment. We

are currently negotiating to move to a larger purpose built foundry site and my day typically starts with analysing the data and arranging site visits to ensure that the move will progress smoothly. Our aim is to keep production disruption to a minimum. I am currently working on the layout of the site with CERAM; a key aim of the move is to lay the site out so that work can flow smoothly and the factory will be cost efficient. In these days of lean manufacturing, we are all too aware that effective time management shows on the balance book at the end of the year, and ultimately we can pass this on to the customer.

The move will be a huge operation. Over the last two years LWD has invested £250,000 in new process equipment, including total manual handling manipulators, wax vacuum fillers and the first totally automated casting gate grinding robotic system. This has been designed as a generic system which develops an efficient and flexible solution ensuring high productivity and cost effectiveness. We are proud of this innovative product; it was designed by LWD and VA Technology and is the first of its kind in the UK. These initiatives, not only provide our workers with a safe environment to work in but help to reduce those all important lead times, without compromising the traditional

LWD quality.

By 10.30am I could be on the telephone to a London Gallery; LWD has also set up a sister company, ArtEng in January 2005, which manufactures sculptures, artefacts, decorative ware and a range of corporate awards and corporate gifts. This is one area in which we have seen huge growth and interest as word gets around the art world. Bronze sculptures have always been popular, but of unique significance is our ability to cast these objects in stainless steel. The manufacturing techniques we are currently developing will allow us to produce limited edition works as well as longer runs.

It is particularly satisfying to help an artist develop a design and then see it finished, polished and on display. This is one area in which I have been involved from the start and to see it taking off is very rewarding.

By lunchtime we will all be ready for that well earned cup of tea, (still oiling the wheels of industry) and if it's my turn I make it. We may have an impromptu sales meeting, both of our sales directors have over 30 years experience of the casting industry, and we use the time to catch up on recent projects, ensure that all drawings are in and tools are progressing as planned. We have a number of subcontract toolmakers who work closely with us in the design stages and employ the latest CAD drawing technologies.

At LWD we are aware of the growing casting market abroad, and rather than feel threatened by it, we recognise that in a global economy there is room for us all. I am currently liaising with Essex and Wolverhampton Universities, as part of an Engineering Cluster Initiative to promote relationships with partners abroad. We have used the facilities the universities can offer on the technical forefront to give UK businesses the edge over competitors. Indeed, in January I flew out to India to meet with several prospective partners for future business ventures. I am in constant contact with one of the foundries with whom we hope to form a successful partnership. We are currently in the design stage on several projects and I have to ensure that technical information is collated and sent to the relevant departments. We have to ensure that any castings we offer will pass the usual high quality test on which LWD has built its reputation.

By 5pm I try to ensure that any important calls have been made and the telephones quieten down. I can then turn my attention to the following day, check my schedules and ensure that everyone is aware of the latest developments in the move. In a small company everyone needs to pull together and be involved.

I regularly take reports home to type. Indeed during the planning for the move the Bennett household has been a flurry of activity as we work on the budget and layout plans for the new move.

A long hot bath with the finest oils and I'm ready to call it a day. A very ordinary day in an extraordinary company.

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