

9. Looking Ahead

Where Do We Stand at Present?

Industry groups and pundits are often a little too close to their subjects to see them clearly. If something takes up your entire field of view it may seem bigger than it really is.

The estimated annual sales of additive fabrication system manufacturers was in the neighborhood of \$625 million worldwide for 2008. Revenue for independent software and material suppliers adds roughly another \$245 million for a total of approximately \$870 million. There are other substantial segments of the market such as service bureaus that bring the total to something over \$1 billion, but \$870 million is the portion that is directly related to the sales of the technology itself.

Is this a lot? Is this amount of revenue sufficient to have a large impact on society? It's hard to know. However, we can say that the worldwide market for additive fabrication technology now exceeds the entire US markets for ketchup and hair spray - combined. It is approaching parity with pickles, but it has a long way to go to catch up with dog food. Perspective is everything. [1]

The question is, Where do we go from here?

Impediments to Wider Adoption

Education and Unmet Expectations

Stratasys has said that even as late as 2008 one of the main stumbling blocks is still education. After more than twenty years of introductory articles in the trade and consumer press, case studies, art exhibits and tens of thousands of published patents and academic papers, additive fabrication is still nearly invisible to the general public. Worse yet, it's still invisible to a large fraction of the technical community, as well.

Once people see an additive process, very often stereolithography, they become excited at the possibilities. But once they see the price and the resulting parts, excitement may be followed by disappointment. Much of the output from most processes just doesn't look pretty, and even looks amateurish. That can be a turn-off, as well as the fact that most of the processes themselves simply don't seem to seize peoples' imaginations.

Even today, with its unit sales in decline, the process that is stereolithography. There is something about the way it seems to be a realization of what people have in mind on in the Star Trek Replicator. But finding that it does quite expensive to boot, may paint the entire field with

**The rest of the Chapter is Omitted
in this brief sample.**