

It Ain't a Microwave

I recently heard some remarks from the chief operations officer for a major railroad line. It gave me a new appreciation for just how complicated and difficult that business is. He used an expression, "It ain't a microwave," that I know will really hit home for the Glenair family—or for that matter anyone who is involved in a business.

Glenair only does a small percentage of our "industrial strength" connector business with freight outfits (most of our rail connectors go into "more sophisticated" and technology-rich passenger/metro trains). But while the technology is pretty straightforward, the freight side of the industry is anything but unsophisticated. Just imagine the attention to detail required to load, transport and deliver the millions of tons of cargo moved on trains every year. Samuel Jackson's character in *Jurassic Park* remarked that the operation had "All the complexities of a major theme park and a zoo" rolled into one. But the railroad freight business has him beat.

For example, the typical rail freight operations report for a single day is a thick stack of incidents running the gamut from vandalism to theft to train/automobile accidents. On a trip from the mid-west to the west coast, a freight train passes through regulatory environments of a dozen states. It may be subject to any number of weather-related bottlenecks—from floods to snow storms to forest fires. Safety issues abound; shipments require constant tracking, hazardous material transport is highly regulated, late-deliveries get penalized, labor disputes can erupt, rolling stock and track maintenance issues surprise—the list goes on and on. And every problem/delay has a ripple effect impacting the entire system. As the railroader explained, "It ain't a microwave. You don't get to just take a problem, pop it in a microwave and serve up a hot solution. Everything is interrelated and full of unexpected consequences. Everything requires great care and attention to detail."

Returning to Glenair, the same can be said of our operation. Many aspects of what we do are not necessarily "sophisticated" but, taken together, are extremely complex. Just look at a "simple" connector with its dozens of metal and resilient component parts, qualification inspections and approvals, material sourcing requirements, tight dimensional tolerances, plating specifications, lead time deadlines and so on—and imagine how many ways there are for something to go wrong. And of course we don't just manufacture a single flavor of connector, but tens of thousands of unique part numbers every year.

We love what we do here at Glenair and are proud of the important role our products play in keeping the world moving, communicating, and advancing to a better and safer quality of life. But like the man said, "It's not a microwave." The complexities of our business—and the value our products and services provide—go hand in hand. And that, my friends, is what makes it all worth doing.

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