Robotic automation in the job shop

In my more than 20 years in the robotics industry, much of my focus has been helping job shop owners understand the benefits that robotic automation provides. Small shops with fewer than 20 employees are purchasing a significant number of machine tools; however, job shop owners are now having a difficult time finding people who are able to operate and maintain the machines.

We’ve all heard the term “skills gap,” but now that it’s a reality, what does it mean to your company? The bottom line is there are not enough people available to fill manufacturing jobs. That’s where robotic automation and a trained operator will help your job shop maintain a competitive edge.

So how can we effectively implement robotic automation into the job shop environment where many of the products/parts run in small batches with a high mix? See Automation page 3

The relevance of a strong team

BY BOB RUBENSTAHL
GENERAL MANAGER
JERGENS INC.

The topic of this article may seem somewhat basic, but as we progress through our careers and our daily challenges, it is easy to overlook or even take for granted the importance of developing and supporting your management team.

When we are early in our professional careers, we typically don’t start out managing people. We start out with a job description that defines our daily tasks and projects. We then work very hard to accomplish the goals and tasks that are expected of us. Based on the successful completion of those tasks over a period of time and also having a little luck we are promoted to the level of “manager.” This is a very different challenge as we now need to accomplish more goals and more objectives, but we need to accomplish them through others rather than depend on our own skills and drive.

This change in our role can be difficult for us to accept because prior to being managers, we have most likely done what we are asking our team members to accomplish and we have our own style for getting it done. It is in many instances easier for us to accomplish the task we are asking a team member to do than it is to explain to them how to do it. The challenge is to step back, let someone develop their own style for getting things done, and then support them; mistakes will be made and they can be valuable learning experiences. If you don’t step back, you will be limited to what you alone can accomplish instead of getting more done with a team.

Another challenge is to put the right team in place. As managers, one of the most important opportunities and responsibilities we have is hiring. It is easy to hire people, but hiring the right people can be challenging. I strive to make this easier by always trying to hire someone smarter than me. I know what you are thinking — that should be easy! You may be intimidated by impressive resumes and are looking for people to develop and teach. Staffing your team with the best talent you can find and supporting them (rather than trying to teach them) allows you so much more time to get goals and objectives accomplished.

The lesson: Hire the best people you can find, hold them accountable, trust and support them.
BIG KAISER is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year, commemorating its 1948 founding by Heinz Kaiser in Rümlang, Switzerland. Heinz Kaiser was 25 when he decided to give up his permanent job and start his own business near Zurich, Switzerland. His goal was to manufacture high-quality, modern tools in his own workshop. The company continues to pursue R&D into products that are essential for today’s smart manufacturing industry.

The company also announced that Gillian Campbell has joined the team as the Marketing Communications Manager. Gillian brings more than 20 years of experience in content strategy to the role. She has worked on the marketing teams for several manufacturers, most recently at a precision metrology company. She also previously served as editor of Quality magazine.

**FESTO**

Festo announced a new $90 million investment at its Regional Service and Manufacturing Center in Mason, Ohio, expanding the facility by nearly 350,000 SF and adding 350 jobs. Construction is expected to be complete by 2024. The expansion will add significant capability for logistics and production.

The company also announced that Dr. Nikolas Gebhard joined Festo in 2012 and has worked with the company in the Engineering and Supply Chain divisions. Schily will stay on through the end of June to ensure a smooth transition.

Brian Papke, chairman of manufacturing technology leader Mazak Corporation, has been inducted into the Northern Kentucky Business Hall of Fame. He accepted the award in April at the Metropolitan Club in Covington, Kentucky, where he delivered heartfelt remarks that credited Mazak’s customers and its employees for the company’s success.

**Southern States Machinery, Inc.** announced the purchase of a new 6,000-SF facility in Mooresville, N.C. The machine tool distributor will be hosting numerous vendors and industry experts for Spring Fest, its grand opening celebration.

“This new facility is our latest commitment toward continually supporting our metal fabrication market base through application engineering, service support, and technology education,” said President Kevin Kilgallen.

“We want to deliver a world class buying experience.”

Hexagon AB has acquired ProCAM Srl, an Italian distributor of CAD CAM solutions and complementary software. Founded in 1995, ProCAM is a reseller of the Edgcam and Radan solutions from the Hexagon-owned Vero Software. ProCAM joins Hexagon’s Manufacturing Intelligence division and will operate within the Vero organization.

Initially established as a dedicated reseller of Edgcam, ProCAM has expanded its offerings to include Radan, as well as complementary packages in the production software tools. Headquartered in Padova, Italy, the company employs 15 people and supports an extended network of sub-resellers serving the wider Italian market.

**Get ready: It’s open house season**

“Tis the season … for open houses! Whether you are hosting, exhibiting and partnering, or thinking about attending, AMT has the resources to help you. Buyers, suppliers, technical partners, builders, and distributors can all benefit from the education, prospecting, networking, and customer engagement that open houses provide.

Hosting or exhibiting? In addition to inviting your customers, AMT can assist in targeting your audience and finding new prospects. MTProspects, found in your MTrak account, allows you to search Dun & Bradstreet for companies and contacts based upon region, industry classification, and size. Exhibitor Passport, available to both regional AMT/SME and IMTS exhibitors, connects you directly with buyers who have registered to attend trade shows. You can pinpoint prospects based upon the products that they are interested in, whether it’s a milling machine, cutting tools, or automation, and combine other filters like region, buying role, job function, and more. Searching for specific companies and contacts to invite will guarantee the right people are aware of your event.

Ensure your sales and service teams are armed with the skills and credentials to actively engage attendees from Manufacturing Technology Sales Fundamentals classes, receiving and updating their Certified Manufacturing Technology Sales Engineer (CMTSE) credentials, and keeping abreast of innovative technology from MIT University.

Members can also request AMT staff to present at your event or help with your presentations on topics such as economic and market updates, disruptive technologies, MTPConnect and other standards, etc.

Looking for an event? Utilizing AMT’s Custom Research offering can help you target the best event in your region with the product specifications that you require.

Be sure to submit your events and press releases so that we can include them in AMT News. You can post them through the “My AMT” section of AMTOnline.org or by emailing them to AMTNews@AMTonline.org.

**Send your company news to AMTNEWS@amtonline.org**

JavaScript cannot be displayed in this environment. Please visit the AMT News website to access the full content.
Hybrid Machine
Continued from page 1

Perhaps – and yet, perhaps not.

Let’s begin with a definition (and others are possible): let’s define the evolution that has led us to the current hybrid transformation is best viewed in a more historical context. For many years, machine tools were built as precise, productive, single-function tools. With the advent of CNC – and powerful on-machine controls – machines slowly acquired multi-tasking capabilities (mill/turn/drill, etc.). The motivation for multi-tasking was clear. Reduced set-ups meant reduced costs, better precision, and a host of improvements in other shop-floor metrics.

The primary industrial additive processes began in a fashion that is similar to single function machine tools. Powder bed fusion was the most popular early 3D printing process used for industrial parts (where you have powder feed stock and inject energy into a bed of distributed powder). Likely, the next most popular process was directed energy deposition (where material is fed together with the energy source, also called 3D welding by some). Machines in both categories were singularly capable of executing one process. And yet, if we look at many, and perhaps most, finished industrial parts that used either of those processes, we see surfaces that were ultimately touched by a subtractive process.

Additive manufacturing opens up a dizzying array of possibilities for design and part feature choices. But, in the same context that led to multi-tasking machine tools, the embedding of additive and subtractive processes in the same machine can have compelling economic incentives.

Early work in hybridization emerged in Japan as long as 20 years ago. Researchers there began to experiment with using powder bed fusion to add material, and then to periodically use a milling process to provide dimensional and surface finish improvements. This work led to the unveiling of the first fully commercial hybrid machine - the Lumex machine by Matsuura in 2012. Simultaneously, other researchers were experimenting with the idea of using directed energy deposition as the additive process in the hybrid environment. The Reclain project in the U.K. was focused on machine flexibility and worked toward a tool-changeable approach to material addition. Their first machine tool to demonstrate the concept was in the U.K. in 2012. It was the first demonstration of complete interoperability between additive and subtractive processes. Out of that collaborative research project emerged Hybrid Manufacturing Technologies, which uses a tool changing approach to achieve the hybridization of processes.

The evolution of hybrid machines has been remarkable since 2012, scarcely five years ago. An unscientific count on my part indicates that there may be currently more choices in hybrid machine models than there are single function models of machines offering powder bed fusion or directed energy deposition. Some of these choices of hybrid machines are offered by traditional, subtractive machine builders and some have emerged the other way, from the additive manufacturing side.

So, back to the original point.

Are hybrid machines, in fact, a “new” thing? Or, as I would suggest, are hybrid machines merely an extension of the multitasking that machine tools require, in order to continue to power the manufacturing productivity revolution? In either case, it is a trend that will be with us for a long time.

Dave Burns is an additive manufacturing expert and former chairman of AMT.

Secrets to successful custom workholding

Custom workholding is the highly engineered foundation that connects machine operators/automation and machining centers/tooling to raw materials, with the purpose of transforming them into precision-machined components.

So what are the secrets?

Dream.

Machining processes should always start with dreams. Take a little time. Ask your team, “What would be the perfect process?” Dream big, throw away preconceptions, forget how it was done before, consider the ideas of new talent, and most importantly, use your imagination. Ask the following questions:

• How can we achieve an optimal cycle time?
  Consider new approaches and investigate aggressive machining strategies. Explore machining more features with less part handling.

• Should we build flexibility into the process to machine different part numbers? Focus on dependable and repeatable quick changeover.

• How close to zero scrap can we get? Think through how consistency can be built into the process.

• How can we achieve peak spindle utilization? Study the cost effectiveness of loading more parts on fixture, allowing more uninterrupted cut time.

Define.

This is where dreams meet reality. There are always constraints and challenges, including budgets, timing, having to use existing less desirable equipment and a host of others. In this phase, blend ideal dreams with past experience, best practices, and unique unmovable constraints to frame the best possible process. This is an excellent opportunity to partner with trusted workholding and tooling suppliers and use their expertise to better define success.

The final steps are Develop, Implement, and Maintain. If Dream and Define are done correctly, development, implementation, and maintaining the process will be more likely to fall into place with methodical diligence. In these steps, continue to allow the dream-driven definition to lead the way. Avoid plunging into a rut of doing things the way they have always been done.

Not taking the time to dream or become intimate with the process will be costly. Labor, lost opportunities, and solutions that become stumbling blocks may result in decreased customer satisfaction and profitability. Remember to partner with trusted suppliers who support innovation to help dream and define success. These are the secrets to successful custom workholding that will ensure a solid competitive edge in the marketplace.

For further information on the Automation in Manufacturing Committee or how to get involved, please reach out to Marcel Beraud, Director, Global Services at mberaud@AMTonline.org

Dream big, throw away preconceptions, forget how it was done before, consider the ideas of new talent, and most importantly, use your imagination.”
India – reforms drive manufacturing growth and ease of doing business

BY ARUN MAHAJAN
AMT INDIA GENERAL MANAGER

In July 2017, India implemented its biggest tax reform since its independence in 1947. The new Goods & Services Tax (GST) replaces more than 10 different taxes that existed for several decades. GST will make business transactions much simpler and more predictable by removing certain cascading tax levies that were built into the previous multiple taxation system. The aim is to bring efficiency into the system by eliminating loopholes, reducing compliance issues, and facilitating the movement of goods between states.

Economic experts are projecting that over the next three to four years, this tax reform will provide a 1-2 percent additional boost to the country’s GDP due to the increase in demand as the new efficiencies lower the price of goods. The latest projections from the World Bank and other forecasters predict the Indian economy to grow 7-8 percent over the next five years, putting it at the top of the charts for major industrialized countries. Additionally, the government’s continued focus on reforming business processes and procedures will, experts predict, result in India jumping about 30 positions in the World Bank ranking for “Ease of Doing Business.” These are significant developments!

The government’s efforts and thrust on implementing the “Make in India” program, aimed at positioning India as the fifth largest manufacturer in the world by the year 2020, continues on course. The manufacturing activities across aerospace, automotive, construction equipment, capital goods, energy & power, railways, medical equipment, etc., should consistently see a double-digit growth over next five-year period.

The Indian Aerospace and Defence Modernization Program will see investments of around $200 billion over the next four to five years. The sectoral policy reforms have helped India attract foreign investors to partner with Indian companies to establish a local manufacturing base, both for internal consumption and export.

Some of the recently announced projects include:
- Tata Advanced System has partnered with Lockheed Martin for the assembly and production of F16 fighter jets.
- Saab has partnered with the Adani group for the assembly and production of Gripen fighter jets.
- Reliance Defence Limited formed a JV with Thales to fulfill a $4.4 billion offset obligation for 36 Rafale jets that India has contracted with France.
- RDL signed an MOU with Daher Aerospace France, to jointly explore opportunities in the design and development of composite parts, aero structure components, airframes, and assemblies.

According to the Society of Indian Automotive Manufacturers, the automotive sector should experience growth of around 8-9 percent over the next two to three-year period. The sector forecasts a turnover of $100 billion by the year 2020. Under the Automotive Mission Plan (AMP 2016-2026), the government has established a goal of a 7-12 percent contribution to the country’s GDP. In the auto components sector, India is forecasted to become the world’s third-largest manufacturer by the year 2026. The government is also working on the framework to have vehicles for public transportation 100 percent electric by 2030.

Electronic hardware consumption is another area where the demand is forecasted to rapidly grow from the present $100 billion to $250 billion by the year 2022. As a result, electronic hardware manufacturing in the country is projected to grow from $45 billion to $120 billion in the same time frame.

With substantial manufacturing growth, progressive tax reform, and a vastly improved business bureaucracy, India is now an easier place than ever to sell your products. The AMT Tech Centre in Chennai has all the necessary experience, resources, and expertise to assist you.

For further information about joining the Tech Centre, please contact me at arunmahajan@AMTIndia.org.
April brings showers of promotional events for IMTS 2018

Traditional April showers mean something different for IMTS. For us, traveling the world to three major advanced manufacturing events in just under three weeks is part of our spring routine! It was all to promote IMTS and the exciting features that will be a part of this year’s show.

Where were we?

• MACH 2018, Birmingham, U.K.
  April 9-13
• CCMT, Shanghai, P.R.C.
  April 9-13
• HANNOVER MESSE, Hannover, Germany
  April 23-27

MACH 2018

On April 9, AMT Director – Industry Partnerships Bonnie Gurney and I held a press conference and delivered a presentation about IMTS 2018 for the first time ever at MACH, a show owned and organized by the Manufacturing Technologies Association, AMT’s counterpart in the UK. As longtime IMTS partners, MTA participates in the international center during IMTS 2018.

Interconnected technology and the future of manufacturing were evident across exhibitor displays at MACH, but especially in the AMRC booth representing the University of Sheffield Advanced Manufacturing Research Centre. AMRC will be honored at the Celebrate Manufacturing Gala at McCormick Place on Wednesday, September 12. To learn more about the gala, contact Bonnie at BGurney@AMTonline.org.

CCMT 2018

On the other side of the world and just three days later in Shanghai, AMT Director – International Exhibitions & Sponsorships Bill Herman and a team of IMTS vendors and partners held a press conference at CCMT, the China CNC Machine Tool Fair recognized as one of the most important machine tool exhibitions in China and Asia. Bill, Steve Miller and Herbert Kaltschmid, Commercial Director of DSV Fairs and Exhibition Services, also presented an exhibitor workshop to more than 90 CCMT exhibitors who will exhibit at IMTS 2018.

HANNOVER MESSE

Two weeks later, on April 24, Bonnie and I returned to Europe to participate in a press conference in conjunction with HANNOVER MESSE. Our IMTS partners Deutsche Messe of Hannover, Germany, were represented by SVP Marc Siemering, their U.S. office (Hannover Fairs USA) by President/CEO Larry Turner and the State of Illinois by Governor Bruce Rauner. IMTS 2018 will mark the first use of the HANNOVER MESSE name outside of Germany. The prestigious HANNOVER MESSE has been the world’s premier industrial event since 1947.

Exhibitors at HANNOVER MESSE totaled 5,000, while visitors totaled 210,000 with more than 70,000 from outside Germany. This year’s featured partner country was Mexico, and the event was opened by German Chancellor Merkel and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto.

Grand Finale at McCormick Place

Two days later, upon his return from Germany, Illinois Governor Rauner held a press conference at McCormick Place. He welcomed HANNOVER MESSE to IMTS 2018 and announced the promise of new advanced manufacturing jobs coming to Illinois. Throughout the conference, AMT Senior Director – Exhibitions Operations & Marketing Michelle Edmonson, as well as Metropolitan Pier and Exposition Authority CEO Lori Healey flanked the Governor.

What did these events have in common? Rain. Well, besides rain, these events showered us with opportunities to promote IMTS 2018 to a worldwide audience, and generated enthusiasm and publicity to kick off our 2018 marketing campaign! (To see the IMTS video presented at these events, go to IMTS.com/IMTS2018.)

Get Noticed at IMTS 2018!

Exhibitor Product Innovation Competition

All aspects of advanced manufacturing are eligible. Winners will be featured in the August and September IMTS 2018 promotional campaign.

Accepting entries through June 30, 2018.

WWW.IMTS.COM/EXHIBITOR/CONTEST

PETER EELMAN
Vice President, Exhibitions & Business Development

From left to right: Peter Eelman, Larry Turner, Bruce Rauner, and Marc Siemering.
A modern-day refresh on The Graduate

In addition to bringing April showers and May flowers, the arrival of spring also means graduation season.

If you attend a graduation ceremony or graduation party for a family member or friend, we ask one favor: suggest an education and career pathway in manufacturing.

Do you remember the movie The Graduate, particularly the poolside advice that Mr. McGuire gave to Ben Braddock? “I want to say one word to you. Just one word. Are you listening? Plastics. There’s a great future in plastics. Think about it. Will you think about it? Okay. Enough said. That’s a deal.”

Mr. McGuire gave good advice at the time the movie was released in 1967. Plastics would have been one of many up and coming technology disruptions in the late 1960s.

Now, with your years of experience in the manufacturing industry, put yourself in Mr. McGuire’s shoes (or Ms. McGuire, as the case may be). What advice would you give to a new graduate — or to any middle school or high school students for that matter — as well as to their parents?

My advice for the past few years has been this: “mechatronics.” But I don’t stop at just one word.

Mechatronics is to this generation of graduates what plastics might have been to the generation of graduates some 50 years ago. Mechatronics is defined as a multidisciplinary field of science that includes mechanical engineering, electronics, computer engineering, telecommunications engineering, systems engineering, and control engineering.

Whether a student wants to become a mechatronics technician or an engineer, they have the choice to attend either a program where they’ll earn a two-year associate’s degree plus an industry-recognized credential at a community college or a four-year bachelor’s degree at a university or college.

And the jobs will be there for them when they graduate from their post-secondary education.

Currently, we’re all aware that a skills gap exists in manufacturing. Data from the largest consulting firms in the United States suggest that the skills gap will grow from about an average of 320,000 open positions per month to about 2 million by 2025. Most recently, the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the gap was 460,000 in February — a sign that the gap may be suddenly widening.

The skills gap is continuing to widen for a number of reasons. First, there are about 10,000 baby boomers retiring every day now and companies are not doing enough to incentivize them to stay on the job a little longer to act as mentors for the next generation. In addition, new innovations and new technologies are growing at an accelerating pace. Disruptive technologies like additive manufacturing, collaborative robotics and other advances in automation, data science, machine learning, and artificial intelligence make it clear that the education market needs to catch up with these technologies.

Fundamentally, though, the skills gap is widening because there are still not enough young people seeking an education in STEM and a career pathway into manufacturing.

In Smartforce Development at AMT, we’re always working to change that dynamic. The Smartforce Student Summit at IMTS is one of our big opportunities to impress students and change perceptions about careers in manufacturing among educators, administrators, and parents.

This September, mechatronics and the digital factory future will be front and center at the summit. Our industry’s vision of the STEM and manufacturing classroom of the future will be on full display.

We hope that you will suggest to schools in your area that they attend the summit. And we hope you’ll be reminded during this graduation season to continue to have that conversation about mechatronics and other careers in manufacturing with this next generation of students.

To watch the scene from The Graduate on YouTube, search for “The Graduate one word: Plastics.” Mr. McGuire’s advice could have been something like one of these disruptive technologies: Google or YouTube or iPhone or … think about how many jobs those companies and technologies have created. Now, think about additive and collaborative and data and connectivity with sensors and AI. That’s how quickly we get to 2 million unfilled jobs.

For more frequent updates about Smartforce Development, follow @GregoryJones on Twitter.
Take your networking game online

As has been mentioned in AMT News time and again, you really can’t place too much value on networking when it comes to how it can benefit your career. Last month I talked about tactics for doing it in person even when you really don’t want to. This time let’s talk about taking it online.

Some will say that the internet means you already have a sizeable network in place, and that all those 2nd and 3rd connections on LinkedIn are already a part of your circle. Unfortunately, that’s far from the truth. It still comes down to relationship building. But before that, it’s about identifying your influencers, having something to show them, and connecting with them in a meaningful way (the trickiest part).

Identify your influencers:

You must identify your targets before you can connect, right? If you already have a particular expert in mind, your work is done. But maybe you have a particular expert in mind, your work is done. But maybe you’re looking for a decision-maker at a company to do business with them, or you’re looking for a job there but don’t have a personal contact. Start at the high level and then drill down – follow the company on LinkedIn, Twitter, or other online means (for example, subscribe to their online newsletter). Read up to monitor company activities but more importantly to see what names are mentioned in their content.

Give them some attention:

Once you’ve found those influencers, start listening to them. Google them. Read their blog posts and status updates. (You can follow folks on LinkedIn without sending an invitation to connect – more on that later.) Find out what their interests are and the topics they discuss regularly. Like, comment on, and share their posts. If you are writing your own blogs and social posts, quote your influencers in your own content. Then make sure they know about it – share on social media and tag them. If you’ve got that blog, ask them for content as a guest post.

Have something to show people:

If you’re raising your own visibility, you need to have something to show what you’re about. LinkedIn has a wonderful publishing platform for writing your own articles. While you’re there, update your profile regularly. Give status updates about what you are working on. Not a writer? Consider video blogging. Be prepared for what you’re going to say, and make sure you have a nice setting with good lighting and a good backdrop, and be sure to dress professionally – at least from the waist up!

Perform regular maintenance:

Once you’re connected with your influencer, the work has just begun. Reaching out only when you have a favor to ask is not likely to get you very far. Once you have those connections, keep engaging with their online posts. Endorse their skills on LinkedIn. And take it offline too – add them to your holiday card list, and if you’re at the same event or visiting their city, arrange for an in-person meeting. If your influencer is speaking at an event, quote them on social media and tag them. You might even approach them to take a picture together!

A word about LinkedIn (and email):

LinkedIn is the place to be for online networking. However, it’s not a good place for a first step. Those cold call invitations are likely to get ignored unless you can demonstrate that you already have a lot of quality connections in common with that individual. Personally, I ignore many invitations that I receive, often because they appear to be a leader for a sales pitch. For that reason, you’ll need to build some awareness and rapport with your intended target elsewhere. This is also true if you happen to have your influencers professional email address – be careful about using it as your first line of communication.

Change your attitude:

Finally, it’s important to think of networking less as a transactional exchange and more like building a productive relationship. While you might already have an end goal in mind (product sales, job leads, etc.), don’t forget that we are human beings first. Be willing to spend time developing and cultivating your relationships to keep them with you for years to come.

Contact me at pbrown@AMTonline.org.
Stopover in Dublin – Brilliant!

For anyone who travels internationally, one of the biggest hassles we face is jet lag. If you’re like me, any sleep is intermittent at best. I tried using alcohol as a sleep medicine, but the result was a massive hangover halfway through the flight. Tom Sheridan, Vice President of Marketing for Royal Products is stepping in as my “ghost writer” this month to share his solution to this universal jet lag problem. I’m sure that you will find Tom’s solution not only effective but enjoyable. “Europe via Dublin” — it’s genius!

There are many reasons I like to travel to Europe via Dublin. Almost all U.S. flights to Europe are overnight. If you fly business class, you can probably get a decent 5x what an economy seat costs.

I like to stick with Delta for domestic and international travel because they have a ton of direct flights out of both LGA and JFK, the airports nearest to me, and staying with one airline helps me earn/keep my upgrade status. Delta offers reasonably priced economy plus seats that have more legroom than regular economy and recline up to 50 percent more.

To get adjusted to the time change, I usually leave on a Saturday night and give myself Sunday to get adjusted. This means that I have all day Sunday to myself. Delta’s solution not only effective but enjoyable. “Europe via Dublin” — it’s genius!

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To get adjusted to the time change, I usually leave on a Saturday night and give myself Sunday to get adjusted. This means that I have all day Sunday to myself. Delta’s main European hubs are Paris, Amsterdam, and Dublin. I’ve used them all, and Dublin wins hands-down for many reasons:

• Because Ireland is so geared towards tourism, I can usually find a roundtrip JFK-Dublin flight in economy plus for under $1,000. Direct flights to other European cities (even in basic economy) often cost considerably more.
• When traveling on your own, it’s always easier to stay in a city where English is the native language. Dublin is also a very friendly city.
• Staying downtown in any city when you have a day to kill is way better than staying at some generic airport hotel.
• I stay in a section of Dublin called Temple Bar. Temple Bar is about a 20-minute cab ride from the airport. By contrast, London is about an hour from LHR by either taxi or train. The area has a ton of great restaurants, pubs, shops, and historical landmarks all within a short walking distance.
• Terminal two at Dublin airport is new and modern, yet small enough to easily navigate. No walking for 20 minutes like Frankfurt, Paris, or Amsterdam airports.
• Clearing immigration and customs when you arrive in Dublin usually takes less than 10 minutes, compared to the 1-2 hours you sometimes have to wait at Heathrow or Frankfurt.
• Many low-cost airlines like Ryanair and FlyBe operate out of Dublin. Sometimes my connections cost less than a bus ticket.
• Ireland’s currency is the euro, making hotels, meals, and shopping less expensive than the UK.
• The U.S. Immigration and Customs Office has a facility right in Dublin airport. This means that when returning home, you clear U.S. Immigration and Customs in Dublin before you board your flight, and therefore return to a regular terminal when you land. This is a huge timesaver!

Let’s face it - there is something almost spiritual about having a pint of Guinness in Ireland!

Other tips:
It’s often difficult to find large American hotel chains in Europe, but I still like to earn points for my stays. I’ve found Hotels.com to be outstanding for booking foreign travel, and they have a great loyalty program. Just be careful because sometimes the best rates have a no-cancelation policy.

The hotel I usually stay at in Dublin is called the Temple Bar Hotel. It’s been recently renovated and is located in the heart of the action, but be sure to ask for a room that doesn’t front Fleet Street or the late-night noise will drive you crazy.

As you know, business travel can be a grind. For me, knowing that I’m going to have a fun day/night in Dublin on either the front or back end (or both) makes it a much more enjoyable experience.