

MODERN 60 SECONDS WITH...

Kazuo Itoh

Itoh Denki Co., Ltd.

TITLE: President and CEO, Itoh Denki Co., Ltd.

LOCATION: Kasai, Japan; Wilkes-Barre, Pa.

EXPERIENCE: 50+ years in the motor business

FOCUS: Developed the first motor-driven conveyor roller, or MDR, in the mid-1970s

Modern: How did motor-driven roller conveyor come about?

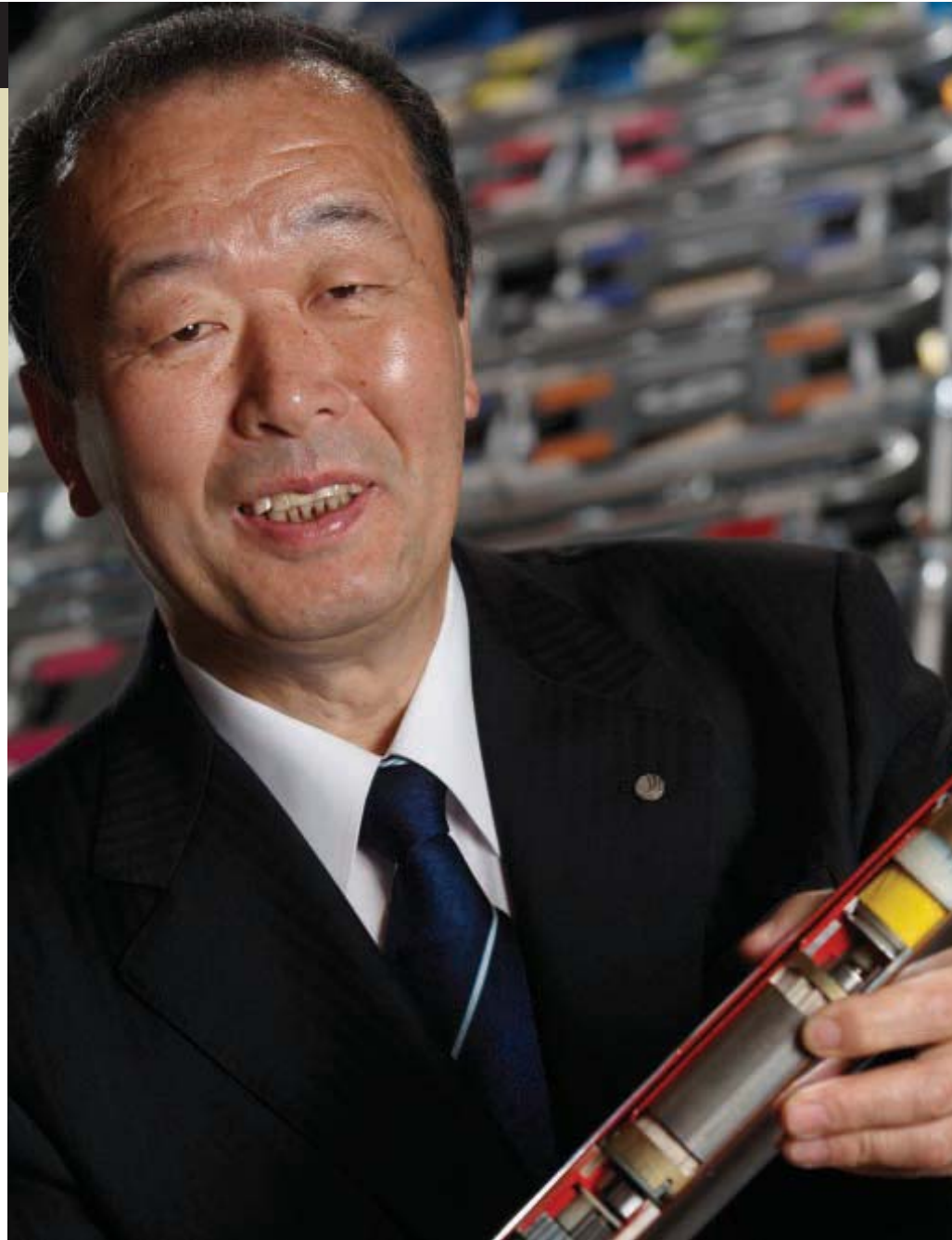
Itoh: Back in the 70s, Japan was a leader in manufacturing. The automotive, consumer electronics and appliance industries were especially strong. One of the keys was being able to quickly change over a manufacturing line for new products. When I looked at conventional conveyor systems, I realized there was a lot of work to install the motors. I thought if you had a modular system, with integrated motors, it would be much easier.

Modern: Was the industry receptive?

Itoh: That was a challenge because it was so new. Our initial solution wasn't a full conveyor system, but was limited to sections such as a transfer conveyor. Our first success was with Panasonic—thanks to the boom in the production of VCRs in the 1980s. But then it was still very much a niche product.

Modern: How did the product evolve?

Itoh: Our first roller used an AC motor. That worked, but it had limita-



tions, which is why it wasn't used to power an entire conveyor. And, our early customers were manufacturers. In the mid-1980s, we built the first rollers with brush and brushless DC motors. Those were much more efficient. Our greatest success came after MDR was adopted by the U.S.

Postal Service. That moved us into the logistics industry and then into e-commerce. Equipment manufacturers understood that with the ability to run on demand, there were many commercial uses for the technology. Our biggest market is still in North America. □