News Release

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Innovation Roundtable Addresses Role of AI, Automation, More at FGIA Annual Conference

SCHAUMBURG, IL – The Fenestration and Glazing Industry Alliance (FGIA) hosted a roundtable discussion called "Embracing Innovation in the Windows Industry” during the 2024 FGIA Annual Conference, with topics ranging from how to create an innovative-thinking environment to ways to address artificial intelligence (AI) in the workplace. This is the third such roundtable FGIA has held in an effort to further advance technologies and processes in the industry.

Panelists included Mike Turner ([YKK AP America](https://www.ykkap.com/)), Morgan Donohue ([Erdman Automation Corp.](https://www.erdmanautomation.com/)) and Dean Ruark ([PGT Innovations](https://pgtinnovations.com/)). Ray Garries (Global Fenestration Advisors) moderated the panel and spoke at the beginning about new developments in artificial intelligence and machine learning. He conducted a digital poll of those in the room. The result showed that 36 percent of session participants said they see early use of AI in their workforces. Panelists shared their thoughts on what is to come down the road.

**Artificial intelligence**

“Our industry is not using new technology as rapidly as others, but we can integrate them,” said Turner. “Evolve the business, don't be resistant to change. Think about your individual processes. We have to figure out how to do this in real time.”

Turner talked about the potential benefits of using AI, such as planning better worker safety and the use of robotic inspection of products. “Setting up a virtual factory could be like creating your processes within the metaverse. You can test things out in a virtual environment before trying it in a physical environment.”

Still, he admitted AI poses unique challenges. “If you put something out there with AI, how can you protect it? This is a good point and something we are trying to understand,” he said.

**Automation**

Donohue focused on innovations in automation, such as his company’s work with FlexScreen, creating an automated, high-efficiency line that can allow window manufacturers to produce them for less than they can make standard window screens.

“Innovation means knowing what you can and can't do. Know your abilities and your limitations. Understand your costs and determine whether or not something makes sense,” he said.

Donohue’s advice for problem solving is to build the right team. “You need big picture people and details people, you need experience.” he said.

**Innovation**

Ruark’s discussion points centered around glass and product innovation. He shared that his company was credited with the first Miami Dade-approved impact resistant glass window in 1994. “This was following the devastation of Hurricane Andrew in 1992. Buildings failed. PGT saw that if you built a stronger window, you could save a lot of lives,” he said.

Now, Ruark said, his company has become known for resistant products. “We talked to customers, and we created a lighter weight laminate glass,” he said. “As we got more comfortable with thin glass, we started to look more into thin triples, something that had been talked about in the industry. These can be large size but are very durable glass.”

Ruark also had advice to would-be innovators. “What has worked for me has been, first of all, genuine curiosity. Have a passion about your work. Communication with your audience is really important. Read about people who inspire you. Listen to great content. Focus on what you can control and embrace new tech,” Ruark said.

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