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The last article in this column concerned the quality of spring wire. It argued that there was a clear trend towards an improvement of quality in every country of the world where significant quantities of spring wire are manufactured, but some readers questioned whether that improvement was continuous and sustainable. Now this is an impossible question to answer, for there is no doubt that measures taken to reduce costs in spring wire manufacture are sometimes at the expense of some aspect of quality, and so continuous improvement, one of the key tenets of ISO 9001, is not always achieved. However, IST are able to take an objective view of wire quality over the last 60 years, and can plot a graph to show a clear general improvement throughout this period – there are inevitably times when the graph is heading in the wrong direction, but such instances are few.

The title of this technically speaking column is social media, and so your author has started with a paragraph that has nothing whatsoever to do with this subject, but does continue the theme of the last column. There is a good reason for this. If social media outlets, used by manufacturing professionals, were to give vent to concerns over spring wire quality, then there would be all sorts of unsubstantiated, and sometimes incorrect, claims and counter claims. An unholy mess would ensue. This is an example of a subject that is wholly unsuitable for social media in your author's opinion – it is a subject that should be investigated objectively and scientifically by a laboratory holding accreditations such as ISO IEC 17025.

However, IST believe social media has a role to play for the general benefit of manufacturing communities such as spring manufacturers, and this is shown in a recent initiative in Linked-In. The "Spring Technology Forum Group" is a vehicle in which the world community of spring manufacturers may air technology ideas for the short or long term future of our industry. That is to say ideas or wish lists for which the opinions of others are sought to gain a consensus as to whether the idea has potential. The wishes may be too big for any individual company to run with, but it may be that they could be pursued collectively or on an international basis. The forum could also be used to air ideas for research into areas of spring technology where more knowledge would be beneficial to all.

IST's general manager, Adrian May, started the ball rolling by posing the question "What kind of technology would be useful to improve your spring manufacturing process?" This has already prompted some interesting ideas, and your author, a member of this group, encourages readers to join in the discussions that are on-going. It is certain that some subjects raised will have been studied previously and members of the group will be directed to results that are already in the public domain. Other members will pose questions that are best answered by attending spring technology training courses, and I am sure they will directed to those on offer. One member asked a question about spring design on the move, which prompted Richard Dignall to say this was a subject that was already being developed, and so he used the forum to invite members to become beta testers for this new technology.

At the time of writing this article there are 97 members of this forum, which is a large number for a group that was started within the last two months, and I expect that there will be many more by the time this column is published. It is also interesting to note that already there are members from 18 different countries around the world, emphasising the global nature of the spring industry. This article is intended to help spread the word and to encourage technical discussions that could be beneficial to springmakers everywhere.

Mark Hayes is Technical Advisor to the Institute of Spring Technology (IST): The International Centre of Excellence for Spring Technology. He is the main instructor for the spring training courses that the IST offers globally.

Readers are encouraged to contact him with comments about this technically speaking column, and with subjects that they would like to be addressed in future.
m.hayes@springexpert.co.uk and also found on Linked-in