

IMTS: Welcome to the Main Event

No matter who you are, IMTS is the show to attend.

Alex Cannella, News Editor

It's hard to think of a show more essential to attend than IMTS. It's the cornerstone event for the industry, the center of the universe for a week, the one show to rule them all. However you want to describe it, IMTS is hands down the biggest and most important U.S. show you can (and should) attend.

"I think everyone can agree that in North America, anyways, it's probably the biggest of them all. No doubt," David Jones, precision workholding manager of Emuge Corp., said.

"We consider it the most important show that we do every two years," Jay Duerr, president of LMC Workholding, said. "We may do some regional shows, but for the most part, we put 90 percent of our show budget towards IMTS."

One might think that this year's soft market would dampen enthusiasm for IMTS, but as we approach the show's opening, both excitement and expectations are high amongst exhibitors.

"You're in this business for a while, so you're not going to stop looking for ways to improve your process," Larry McMillan, Great Lakes regional sales manager at Hainbuch America, said. "And that's really what IMTS is there for is to inform you, educate you."

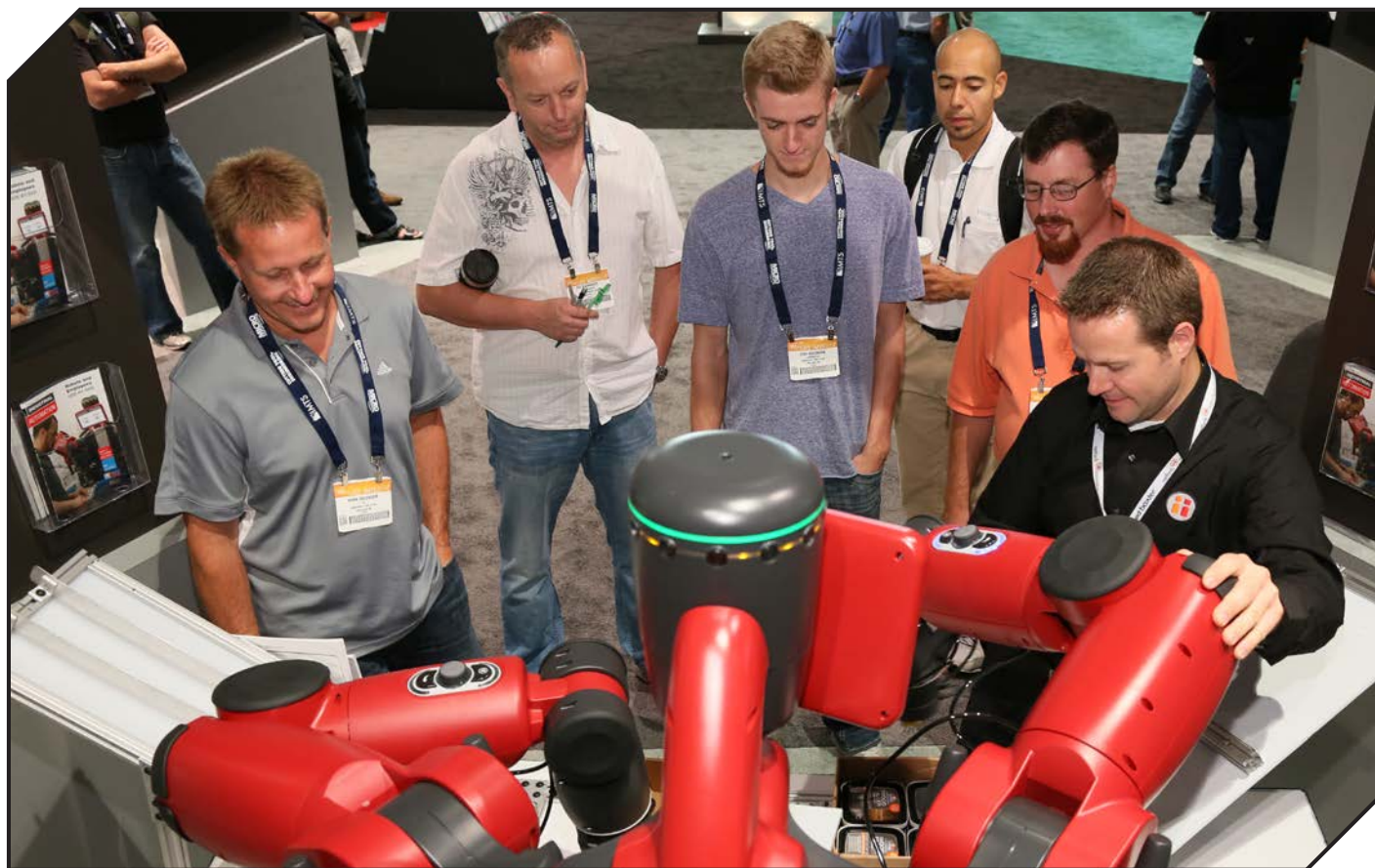
Perhaps contributing to IMTS's ability to weather the current state of the industry is its record year in 2014. IMTS saw 114,147

attendees in 2014, making it the fourth largest IMTS ever. While a lot can change in two years, people still remember the previous show's impact. Patrick Nugent, VP of metrology systems at Mahr Federal, for example, said that despite concerns about the market, their company is still "approaching the show like it's going to be the biggest show ever because of how good 2014 was."

"Two years ago, IMTS was just a really fantastic show," Nugent said. "We had the best show at IMTS in 2014 that we've ever had... There were days when our booth was so full, you could hardly walk through it with customers. They'd ask about one product and then a second one, and you'd have to kind of swim to the aisle to get free and clear and walk down to the other end of the booth and try to swim back in to that product. It was tremendous."

Duerr thinks that while the market may be flat, businesses tend to save their budgets for IMTS as part of their normal buying cycle, and IMTS will remain profitable.

"We think a lot of people actually wait to go to a show, and then when they go to a show, it's for purchasing purposes," Duerr said. "And I know that we can look at this and we can speak to that, as both an exhibitor and as an attendee. Because we're excited about our exhibition and showing our products and wares, but by the same token, my manufacturing group has



got a 2.5 million dollar budget... And their specific purpose is to go to the show and make the purchase there. They've been studying up to this point, they're getting quotes and all that, and really you go to the show and make the last vetting process and then we'll make those decisions there at IMTS."

Another reason some might expect this year's IMTS to defy the market trend is that the demand for booth space far outstrips supply.

"Regardless of whether or not the economy is good or bad... the nature of our business is cyclical, and if you get out, good luck on trying to get your booth space, because there's someone that wants it," Duerr said. "We've tried for the last few years to get a larger booth and we can't."

Not attending IMTS during a slow year means your spot probably won't be there when you come back for a good one, and seeing as no one wants to give up their seat, that means you'll have a full house, flat market or not. At the very least, you'll find plenty of faces doing research for when business is better later.

And space is indeed at a premium at the show. It's yet another testament to its popularity that 1.3 million net square feet isn't enough space for every exhibitor.

It's not hard to see why IMTS is so popular. It has something for everyone, big or small, buyer or exhibitor. The main draw is, obviously, the massive crowds of potential buyers that flock to the show, and the ensuing crowd of exhibitors that follow them looking to show off their newest and coolest products. For smaller exhibitors in particular, this is a golden opportunity to find new customers that may not have even shown up on a mailing list and have never heard of them.

Hainbuch in particular has benefited from exposure at IMTS over the years. "When I first started with Hainbuch, I had a booth inside of somebody else's booth, like a little table to just promote," McMillan said. "And every year, most people didn't know us that well, so for us, it was great exposure to meet new people."

Hainbuch has come a long way from a single table. This year, they have a 40 square foot booth, and McMillan believes IMTS certainly helped the company grow.

"It truly is not some place to just imitate that you're being a salesman for the day," McMillan said. "People are there for a reason. It's a good show to sell to customers or to develop a relationship to sell to them later."

For companies with broad catalogs like Mahr Federal, the exposure benefits are two-pronged. According to Nugent, IMTS not only allows them to establish new contacts, but also to meet current customers that may not be aware of the full scope of the company and potentially sell them additional products and services.

"Because of the volume of attendees and the wide-ranging industries and markets that they come from, we have the opportunity to reach a lot more people who may not know what we do or they may know Mahr Federal because we make such a broad range of products," Nugent said. "They think of Mahr Federal and they think 'oh, well, those guys, that's where we get our surface finish measuring gauges from.' And then they come and they see Mahr Federal and they go 'wow, you make form measuring systems and gear measuring systems and shaft measuring systems and optical systems, and I didn't know

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For companies like Felsomat, IMTS is all about quality face-time — getting to actually sit down with management and company buyers and interacting with customers.

“It’s a very good moment to get to spend time outside the office with some of higher level management,” Patrick Seitz, president of Felsomat, said. “Take them out to dinner, go have a drink with them and get some facetime not in an office between meetings.”

The social side of the show is just as important for many companies as the actual physical sale of products. Whether it’s catching up with friends in other companies or talking to business prospects, exhibitors are eager to rub elbows and talk to almost anyone they can.

“If you see something, stop,” Jones said. “They want to talk to you. That’s what they’re there for, that’s what we’re there for.”

For big and small exhibitors alike, the social aspect is also about presence. IMTS, being the massive family reunion it is, can make absences a little conspicuous, and just showing up and having a physical presence at the show has its own value.

“At a big show like this, you need to show presence,” Seitz said. “Because otherwise if you don’t go, people ask ‘where’s Felsomat? Where’s this guy? Where’s that guy?’”

“Gleason has a responsibility to our customers and the markets that we serve, so we need to participate in a show like IMTS, basically in support of the global manufacturing landscape,” Gleason VP of Sales John Terranova said.

Another bonus is the ability to learn firsthand about your



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customers. Manufacturers naturally spend a lot of effort marketing themselves, but there are precious few ways to really learn about your customer base. IMTS gives an opportunity to converse and really get to know the people that buy, or are thinking of buying your products, better.

“You want to use the time of the customer most effectively and efficiently so that you really get an overview and [you’re] not just telling him what you want to tell him, but you also ask the right questions so that you get an understanding of their business,” Dr. Thorsten Schmidt, CEO of DMG MORI said.

According to Schmidt, IMTS is critical, but it’s also important to remember that maintaining one’s presence is a year-round effort. IMTS is good for establishing and deepening relationships, but like any other relationship, the leads you pick up at the show need to be maintained.

“[Attending IMTS] is essential for success,” Schmidt said. “But it’s also not the only way how to be successful. The investment and the commitment across the year and throughout the last couple of years have been crucial, so that customers understand that you’re not just showing up at an exhibition and afterwards you’re gone again.”

Everyone at the show has different parts that they get excited about, but as has become a growing theme the past few years, everyone has their eyes on automation. It’s hands down the number one thing manufacturers attending the show are keen on looking at. The rise of the Industrial Internet of Things (or Industry 4.0 if that floats your boat) is catching on at home, and it’s becoming more accessible each year.



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“Whereas automation used to be such a scary thing, even small companies such as ourselves are able to put that in place and really make it useful, because it’s becoming more attainable,” Duerr said. “And the thing we’re most excited about there is how we can couple the great machine tool capability that’s already there and seeing what the new smart controls and automation are doing.”

And they’ll certainly have plenty to look at. Even beyond the advances being shown off at IMTS, two other co-located shows, Motion, Drive and Automation North America and Industrial Automation North America, will both feature automation heavily. All co-located shows are being done by Hannover Fairs, USA. On top of MD&A and IA, Hannover Fairs is also starting three new co-located shows this year: Surface Technology NA, which will cover surface treatment and finishing, ComVac NA, which focuses on compressed air and vacuum technology and Industrial Supply NA, which according to IMTS’s website “will cover the entire spectrum of industrial subcontracting and lightweight construction.”

For such a large show, you would expect there to be a bit more pomp and circumstance around it. A centerpiece concert one night, perhaps, or some other performance added on to give the show that extra coat of glitz and glamour. But IMTS is playing it relatively straight. Not much is changing from 2014 and extra frills are few and far between. The “IMTS Fun Stuff,” as their website is calling it, consists of an IMTS-branded hot air balloon on display and the return of Local Motors, who in 2014 3-D printed a functioning car, the Strati, during the show. Local Motors will be setting up a racetrack where attendees can ride in the Strati, along with other cars designed by the company.

But for the most part, IMTS is about business, and that seems to be the show’s thing: straightforward, to the point, and filled to the seams with value without too many distractions. It’s the big event on everyone’s to-do list, the place everyone goes to do business and catch up with what’s happening in the industry at large. IMTS is already so massive, they don’t really need any bells and whistles to make the show more appealing; everyone’s already going, and you probably should too. ⚙️

For more information:

DMG MORI
Phone: (855) 364-6674
us.dmgmori.com

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