

THE 500 LB GORILLA IN THE WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY

IMTS is back in town. From Sept. 7 through Sept. 15, the largest industrial exhibition in the Western Hemisphere will fill one of the largest exhibition centers in the world. A show of this magnitude is a little like the 500 lb. gorilla in your dining room — hard to ignore.

But like the gorilla in the dining room, IMTS raises certain ambivalent feelings. True, it's big and important, but what does it mean for our industry? The rest of the machine tool business tends to dwarf the gearing industry, and the temptation to sit the show out is strong. After all, there are other trade shows and conferences that relate more directly to our interests. Besides its bigness, what does IMTS have to offer the gear manufacturer, engineer or designer?

A lot. 1,078 companies will display the very latest machine tool products — including gear cutting and finishing equipment — from 27 nations. There is no better place to see the direction manufacturing will take in the coming decades. Running concurrently with the show is the Technology Conference, where some 200 industry experts from around the world will cover every aspect of the latest techniques in manufacturing in 48 separate half-day sessions. One whole session is devoted to modern gear making methods, and at least a half dozen other gear-related topics will be covered. That's a lot of information and opportunity all in one place at one time — information and opportunity we should not ignore.

America's industry has been through some tough times over the last decade. We have suffered from a slightly dulled competitive edge and, more critical in my opinion, a dollar/foreign-currency imbalance that no amount of competitive sharpness could overcome. Now things have changed. Currency balances are much more favorable than they have been in years, and the harsh weeding out process has left American industry leaner, meaner and capable of facing foreign competition. Suddenly our products are in demand again. Exports are growing and our factories are busy. We have been able to come up for air in our struggle to survive the competition.

But we cannot be lulled into complacency. This change for the better is a window of opportunity, not a permanent condition. Exchange rates and economic indicators are never fixed values. Politics, weather, scientific advances, all work to make the situation fluid. We have to make the best use of the good times while we have them. Not only must we repair financial damage, but also reinvest some of our higher profits in our companies, in machines, people, education, systems and information. In the years ahead, we should expect to face larger, better financed and even more strategically oriented competition. We must take advantage of this present opportunity to make ourselves ready.

IMTS is a good place to begin. Even if you're not in the market for machinery today, this is the place to seed what's out there, what the competition is manufacturing, buying and will be using in the future. A show like IMTS or the Gear Expo in Pittsburgh next year is the place to survey all the manufacturing options,



processes and techniques available to lower your costs and improve your quality.

In a chess game, the winner is the player who can plan the most moves ahead. The same is true in the highly competitive, global manufacturing world in which we operate today. Education, information and strategic planning are crucial to economic survival.

Don't let opportunities like IMTS slip by. Windows of opportunity can close as quickly as they open, and the companies that have not used their open time wisely will be shut out in the cold.

Michael Goldstein

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