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CIBRE Hosts Kickoff Forum; Preservation and Prosperity of U.S Tool & Die Industry

By Joe Brown, creator of the blog, *Will the Tool & Die Industry Ever Recover* <http://blog.toolanddieing.com/>

Although many sectors of the domestic manufacturing industry depend on the fortunes of the auto industry, tool and die shops might be the most dependent.

The tooling industry, which includes mold makers, metal stamping plants and precision machining companies in addition to tool and die, is one of the most important—yet little understood—sections of “manufacturing”.

How important is it? Look around you right now. Practically every component in your computer, office desk, chair, car, cell phone was fabricated or formed by a die or mold.

That plastic bottle you’re drinking Pepsi out of was made by a blow-molding tool. What about the thousands of street signs you drive by daily? Likely made by a metal fabricating tool. I could go on for hundreds of pages simply listing every item made by the tooling industry.

For simplicity’s sake, it’s important to know that basically every tangible item we all use in everyday life needed a tool to form it. Stop and think about that for a minute. But the old saying: “Out of sight. Out of mind,” may be at play here.

Recent transgressions have severely hampered the short and long-term outlook for the North American tooling industry.

Too much of this has unfortunately been triggered by circumstances that could have been avoided. Abusive payment terms mandated upon tool, die and mold makers from OEM’s (Original Equipment Manufacturers, or auto companies) and Tier One (parts) suppliers. But the most damaging has likely been a domestic government unwilling to ensure a level playing field in this global game.

A group of us met on a recent Saturday afternoon through the CIBRE (Center for Integrated Business Research & Education) www.sba.oakland.edu/cibre program at Oakland University. Moderating and observing the informal discussion was Mohan Tanniru, dean of School of Business Administration at Oakland.

Making up this group was a mixture of tooling-related company owners, presidents, consultants, writers and specialists gathered to discuss factors prohibiting growth and job creation in the tool, die, mold, metal stamping and precision machining growth from different points of view.

Bob Quinn, president at RCM Tool and key figure in organizing this event knows this all to well. That’s why he was eager to share some of his ideas and thoughts about how innovations in manufacturing can lead us into the next decade and beyond. “Through the help of Dean Tanniru and Oakland University we hope to prove to the community, the tool-and-die shop industry, and our government that we can not only compete, but start winning back jobs from the low cost countries,” Quinn says. “Despite popular belief, the tool-die industry can be a growth industry. We just need to be able to show people how to do it. With a little integration of technology, and some innovative thinking, the U.S. can reestablish its rein as the world powerhouse of manufacturing. Furthermore, we hope, through the success of this program, that we can actually help shape a model of “how to do it” that other similar industries can use to help transforms their industries back to prosperity and a state of jobs creation.”

Tanniru did a commendable job maintaining the groups’ focus and structured some ideas to move forward to get past several of the thoroughly-discussed issues.

Two outcomes that were looked favorably upon from the attendees were:

1. Networking opportunity with like-minded individuals

As expected, each person knew at least one other person in the room but nobody knew everybody in attendance. Sharing traits such as the well-being of the tooling industry as well as a desire to show up and discuss it over the weekend provided solid footing for what will be new business relationships for most.

2. Renewed optimism and structured approach utilizing university-level resources

There’s no doubt this was not the first group to ever meet with the greater good of the tooling industry on the agenda—nor will it be the last. However, it’s rare that a business school at Oakland University avails itself to make certain resources, relationships and assets at their disposal that we would otherwise be without.

The group ended their meeting and the Dean will be facilitating some of the smaller groups that were created to undertake some of the discussed initiatives. Overwhelmingly, the need to educate the masses and educate the educators was *modus operandi* number one. An unbelievable disconnect and lack of understanding exists with most of society.

Decades—even centuries—have proved that nations with manufacturing prowess have enjoyed the most consistent and stable financial systems, economy and national security amongst others. What’s happening before our eyes is a travesty to the North America that’ll be left for our children and future generations.

Events similar to this in other sectors are planned this summer. For more information, see the CIBRE Conversations link on the CIBRE Web site at www.sba.oakland.edu/cibre.

SUMMARY

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