

Emerging technologies

Julia Moore (pictured), GTMA CEO, shares some thoughts on the importance of emerging technologies to the UK mould and die sector, highlighting a forthcoming event intended to reveal some of them

It has been said that; "When it comes to the future, there are three kinds of people: those who make it happen, those who let it happen and those who wonder what happened." Any manufacturing supplier planning to be in business in five years' time must certainly avoid falling into the third category – but it is no easy task to keep up to date with today's

deluge of technical innovations.

To survive it is essential that engineering companies keep themselves up to speed with the latest trends and opportunities, particularly now that OEMs are divesting themselves of all but their core competencies, and passing their technical and development requirements down the supply chain. However, SMEs are often so focused on day-to-day operations that seeking out technological developments can be a low priority. This is where universities, research centres and trade associations can help; providing SMEs opportunities to learn about new product development, processes, markets, techniques, standards or regulations.

And so GTMA has made the dissemination of information on emerging technologies one of the core strands of its strategy (see page 39).

MEET THE SPECIALISTS

In 2008 we launched our first annual Emerging Technologies event, which brought together 13 specialists on a wide range of technical developments. The event proved to be extremely popular, attracting over 100 delegates, including both OEMs and SMEs. The programme featured information on several of the European

Research programmes to support the mould and die industry in which the Association participates, including EMold, KnowEDM and Hiper moulding.

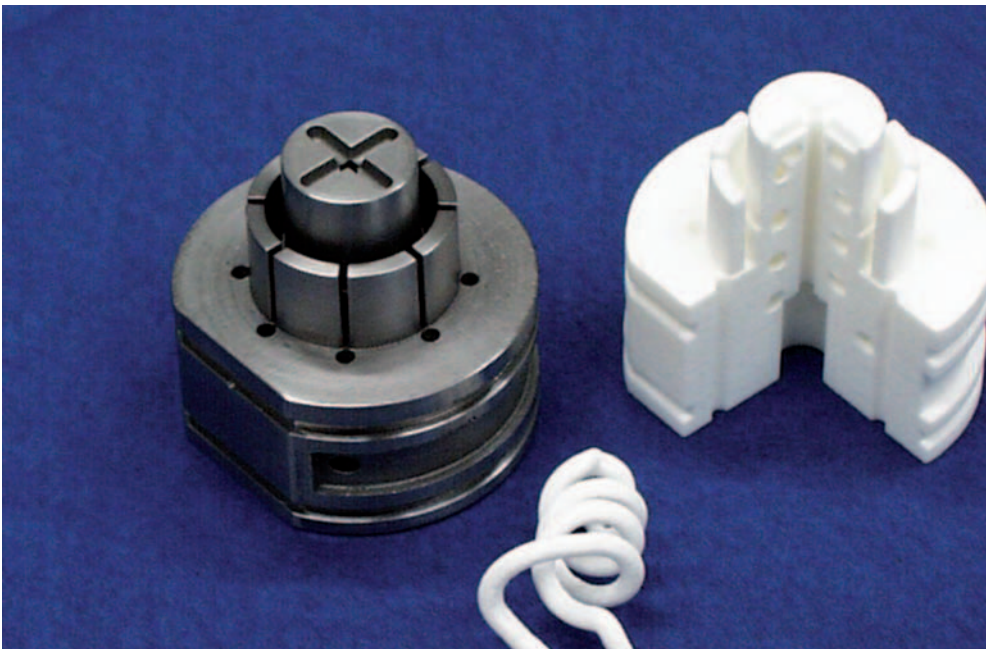
EMold is a three-year project to develop intelligent instrument tooling for the plastic injection moulding process to change moulds from passive elements into active network elements containing 'black box' embedded technology. GTMA member Sprint Tool & Die is a core partner in the project and recently hosted a delegation from Unilever and explained the development of this technology.

Through the EU-project, KnowEDM, faster mould production is being supported with accurate EDM time estimation, automated electrode design and automated selection, while a recently

Spreading the word on technology

We had a table-top display at the Emerging Technologies event where we managed to gain new contacts in addition to reinforcing our relationship with people we had already met. In our experience, working relationships take time to develop and you need to be present at a number of events to get the benefit – we are certainly considering participating at the Emerging Technologies event in 2009." *Darren Webb, business development manager, Paragon Rapid Technologies.*





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completed project, Hiper moulding, developed software for thermal management in injection moulds with real-world tests showing reduction in cycle times varying from 12 to 32 per cent. SMEs are invited to join these projects as an e-member providing companies with the opportunity to offer 'more' to their customers.

Steve Hebdon, senior development manufacturing engineer, BAE Systems, said of the Emerging Technologies event: "Points of contact gained have proved to be very valuable and have led us to follow up on a number of new technologies and possible future production methods."

Indeed, GTMA is to repeat the Emerging Technologies event. To be held at Delcam's Birmingham offices on 4 February, 2009, one of the keynote speakers will be Dr Phil Reeves, managing director, Econolyst, who has 15 years' experience working with some of the world's most influential companies, helping them to maximise their

application of Rapid Manufacturing.

Dr Reeves believes that many UK engineering companies remain unaware of the impact that emerging technologies will have on their businesses within the next five to 10 years, an issue he will be addressing in his presentation. His view is that this is due partly to a lack of in-depth market understanding and partly to

uncertainty generated by the sheer number of new technologies being promoted and the range of applications they are claimed to address.

Changing market forces, the globalisation of manufacture, increasing product personalisation and the effect of environmental considerations regarding material, and energy costs and shortages, make radical changes in products and production methods inevitable. Participants in the engineering supply chain must examine closely the services and products they offer, he suggests. Are their customers really buying mould tools, or what they consider to be an unwelcome but necessary intermediate step in the production of moulded parts?

Experience would say it was the latter, and experience would also indicate that buyers are willing to move quickly, without a backward glance, to new production methods or locations when production economics stack up.

We participate in a rapidly evolving sector, where the areas of greatest change offer the greatest opportunities. The challenge is to make the right changes – and that requires knowledge and vision.

□ For details about the Emerging Technologies event, contact Scott Phillips, project manager GTMA on: 01844 274 222 / email: scott@gtma.co.uk □

Transferring knowledge

GTMA's Knowledge Transfer programme disseminates information to GTMA members through an electronic, bi-monthly Technical Briefing, providing a brief overview of latest developments. This will be developed further in 2009 to include Industry Experts on the Association's website where more detailed information and technical papers will be available.

GTMA, in association with Loughborough University, operates an on-line technical conferencing facility which has successfully trialled a seminar on Technical Road Mapping. It is also actively identifying technical developments in universities and research establishments to discover key experts within specific disciplines, such as the GTMA study tour to the 8th International Colloquium 'Tool and Die Making for the Future' at the Fraunhofer Institute in Aachen.