

Engineering our future

Geoff Bryant, managing director of Citizen Machinery UK, ponders the current economic conditions and asks engineers to stand up and be counted, for there is opportunity for the taking

If there is one thing that manufacturing engineers are proficient at it is understanding long term planning, and that investments made today bring home the bacon tomorrow.

Over the last decade, UK manufacturing has found that by progressively increasing its investment in the best high technology equipment, software and support services available, it has improved competitiveness and good practice capability, while at the same time reduced costs. The sector has also established, by and large, an enviable reputation for quality and delivery.

We've seen much of the very competitive low-cost work progressively transferred overseas – and, in turn, have retained and increasingly attracted work that is more complex and profitable, and demands innovative solutions.

This recession is different to any previous economic threat we've faced; this one is global and instead of blue-collar workers bearing the brunt, the impact is firmly being felt by the white-collar, financial and service sectors. However, I feel because of the sound management decisions made by the manufacturing sector over the last 10 years, we should be well placed to ride out the storm.

While the bankers may be sitting on their hands, having been burnt by unsustainable business practices – driven by growth and profit at all costs – now is the time for us to prove that economic security is driven by adding value by making things. Indeed, with the current exchange rate, the UK should be able to compete with any nation on cost and it is



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time to sing about this from the rooftops.

Our political masters are focusing on getting the man in the street to spend, but I feel we are facing a dawn of opportunity for us to illustrate the importance of how manufacturing can create wealth and add value.

The UK has a fantastic base for manufacturing and should be able to expand its 15 per cent contribution to GDP and 60 per cent of exports, but we

need to create this – and every reader, indeed all engineers in the land, should write to their MPs to hammer home the point that manufacturing is in the position to capitalise on the high technology equipment that has been installed across the country.

It should not be forgotten that companies that continued to invest through the 1990s recession came out lean and competitive. Finance is not a problem today and readily available to industry at an all-time competitive rate. It's a situation that management in forward-thinking manufacturing businesses can harness to further reduce cost bases and build their companies and obtain a good return on any investment for the future.

To open the coffers and continue to invest during an economic slump may, at the moment, seem an unattractive proposition but is the glass half full or half empty? By being positive and willing to increase competitiveness further, this will put the adventurous in the ideal position to capitalise on the economic upturn.

So, let's manage the current situation, signpost our future through long-term planning and, most importantly, tell Westminster that manufacturing is the lifeblood of the nation and that there will never be a better time to create wealth and capitalise on what we've always been good at – engineering our future.□

□ If you want to contact your MP easily, visit www.theyworkforyou.com. You can search for your MP and send him a message via the website.