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## Staying power in high demand

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### Transitions in the European tool, pattern and mould making

>> The text in german language *can be found [here](#)*.

**Transformation processes caused by digitalisation, a growing shortage of skilled workers and an increased international competitive pressure affect every industry worldwide – but the tool and mould making industry in particular. Our business experts will not only analyse the given situation but also look at the changes from different perspectives and provide fresh approaches to possible solutions.**

There is almost no production that can work without cost pressure. While in most cases, growing margins are the reason, for some companies the price war is essential for their survival. An especially sharp wind is blowing right in the face of the tool, pattern and mould making industry. **Prof. Dr.-Ing. Wolfgang Boos** who founded the WBA Aachener Werkzeugbau Akademie GmbH eleven years ago puts it in a nutshell: „We fight a problem of our own making: tool makers sometimes accept prices below the cost of production. That cannot go on for long!“. His guess is that about 30% of the tool makers will not survive the current situation. As an expert for the complete process chain of industrial tool making, he does see some potential to remain successful in the future competitions: „An enterprise can be well set-up in terms of technology but only too many are not set up as well in terms of finances and organisation“. Still, he believes in the European toolmaking industry. “From my point of view, the solution could be to consider the tool and the plant together with the material component as a unit. We should empower the production in future.” That would be good starting point for a successful future, according to Boos.

### Price pressure must be compensated

**Jens Lüdtke** is specialised in strategic orientation, employee management and motivation, and in process optimisation in tool and mould making. Single-part production on an industrial scale in the age of digitalisation is his core topic. He, too, sees the industry at a turning point. “Twenty years ago, we

generated 50% more money for our products. We have to manage to compensate this price pressure!” New business models, cooperations and a clear focus on customer loyalty are in his opinion the key words to act correctly as an entrepreneur.

## Make added value of services visible

The price pressure many companies experience is not a national phenomenon. Similar concerns can be heard in various markets. **Dr. Beatrice Just**, Vice President of Italian the machine building company Millutensil, speaks up for the European toolmaking industry „that is still a guarantee for quality and innovation“. Nevertheless, she also notices an increase in both competences in the international competition. „We exported knowhow in the past. And we did not manage that knowledge transfer well. Now is the time to make the added value of our performance visible, but also to optimise processes, to automate and to develop into a service-oriented industry“, is how she points the way that especially European manufacturers should take in view of the Asian competition.

## We have to take up the challenge!

That the European industry is not in the pole position anymore is confirmed by Daniel Hummel of the Robert Bosch GmbH. For him, there is no need to be overly pessimistic just yet: “A race is not won at the start and not alone. We have to take up the challenge from our very solid starting point and transport the right knowhow. If we managed to highlight the importance of the Total Cost of Ownership in which the actual tool only has a small portion, we would have won a lot already. “ With this view, he widens the outlook on the production periphery and includes machine manufacturers and automation specialists as well as the service staff in the consideration of how to place European manufacturers better in the international competition. Dr Louis Schneider, owner of Schneider Form GmbH, also has a clear idea about what has to be done: “We must occupy niches that may be growing in the long run and which cannot be occupied as quickly by others. In order to find these special fields, we must listen to our customers: The fewer skilled workers they have, the more responsibility we have to take.”

## Foster young talent

Here, he addresses a growing problem a lot of companies still underestimate: the shortage of skilled workers. Only with well skilled workers, companies will manage to provide excellent results in their core fields of competence in future which is to produce tools that meet the highest standards in the varied user sectors. Tomorrow’s skilled workers have to be able to understand their core product as part of a production process and to achieve optimisations in the manufacturing process across sectors. **Bernd Ströhlein**, Section Director of fischer Werkzeug- und Formenbau GmbH, confirms the importance of young talent promotion and has a very positive outlook already: „We are used to solving problems. I am confident that we can inspire young people for the profession. Only the young professionals will guarantee that we head forward with fresh minds and fresh ideas for a successful future.“

*The information used in this article is taken from the lecture “Transitions in the European Tool, Pattern and Mould Making” held at the Virtual Innovation Day 2021 – a targeted measure on the way to Moulding Expo 2023. Among the speakers were **Prof Dr.-Ing. Wolfgang Boos** (WBA Aachener Werkzeugbau Akademie GmbH), Daniel Hummel (Robert Bosch GmbH), **Beatrice Just** (Millutensil S.r.l.), **Jens Lüdtke** (Marktspiegel Werkzeugbau), Dr. Louis Schneider (Schneider Form GmbH) and **Bernd Ströhlein** (fischer Werkzeug- und Formenbau GmbH). Moderiert wurde der Vortrag von **Ralf Dürrwächter** (VDWF) und Markus Heseding, (VDMA). The lecture was presented by **Ralf Dürrwächter** (VDWF) and Markus Heseding, (VDMA).*

*Further information on Moulding Expo, the international trade fair for tool, pattern and mold making, can be found at [www.moulding-expo.com](http://www.moulding-expo.com).*