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George Dettloff, President and CEO, SKF USA Inc. One of the most daunting challenges for customers in the many industries we serve is how to keep machinery running better, longer,more cost-effectively and ever more competitively. In many cases, achieving asset efficiency to meet these objectives has become the primary strategy, but, too often, a struggle to fully realize.

Optimizing equipment efficiency can significantly impact an organization's productivity, quality and profitability. It can influence the ability to compete–or even survive. Companies that focus on overall equipment performance and efficiency typically will discover that they can add capacity without large capital investments.Yet, in our experience, while the benefits of a well-run asset management program can be understood in this context, the landscape may be littered with obstacles that stand in the way of progress.

For example, a company may not be completely equipped with the resources or wherewithal to implement the rapidly developing technologies, processes and cultural changes essential to achieving timely, long-term success in asset efficiency. Another may embrace and begin the process, only to stumble on the rocks of incomplete strategy or insufficient planning and benchmarking. The outcome: inefficient deployment of capital and maintenance resources and, ultimately, failure to achieve desired asset efficiency objectives.

Against this backdrop (and acknowledging the growing importance and links among asset management, maintenance and reliability for all manufacturing operations), our belief is that industry, in general, stands anew at a crossroads. There may be a general willingness to journey on the road toward asset efficiency, but, for many, there are few signposts pointing the way to those who can assist them. One avenue, though, is to enlist qualified supplier expertise.

Typically, machine and component manufacturers represent the vanguard in developing and implementing new technologies. They must take this role because their products, industry reputation and leadership positions in the marketplace often hang in the balance.Many progressive suppliers have, in response, augmented their portfolios with newly cultivated services and capabilities that extend well beyond those that have been associated with traditional maintenance, repair or replacement of equipment.

In SKF's case, as only one example, machine knowledge accrued over nearly a century in applications for virtually every industry has taken us to new customer-service levels. The "service" aspect of our business has advanced significantly as a platform and, in turn, introduced an array of increasingly sophisticated condition monitoring and maintenance diagnostic systems, hardware and software. As a result, our reliability-oriented customers have found a particularly capable and willing partner to share the job of turning the promise of asset efficiency into a reality.

For a multi-faceted global organization like SKF, it can be virtually impossible to identify a single trend that reflects our highest priority in the short-term. Nevertheless, we certainly can report that any trend that encourages strongly rooted partnerships with customers is high on our list.

In the world of maintenance and reliability, especially, such partnerships clearly can help transform asset management into a competitive edge, improve machine and process performance, and deliver comprehensive productivity solutions. In the process, the industry outlook can surely brighten for all participants. **MT**