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Slowly and steadily, the business prospects for our customers in virtually every industry have brightened after the prolonged global economic downturn that challenged so many organizations. Most customers have benefited from taking a closer look at their priorities in this increasingly competitive and still relatively unsettled business environment.

In many cases, maintenance strategies are being newly revisited with an eye toward improving asset performance, reliability and dependability. Operations also are taking greater advantage of the wide array of knowledge-based services and expertise offered by qualified outsourced professionals.

During the past couple of years, customers generally have shifted their emphasis away from maximizing production output (due to less demand in the marketplace) toward improving asset efficiency and reducing operating costs. In this regard, the overarching goal is to eliminate "non-value added" maintenance, rework and scrap, while minimizing energy use, saving time and money in the process. In many ways, we have been able to contribute positively by providing support and solutions for customers traveling the road to improved profitability and growth.

One example to illustrate this point is the SKF® Asset Efficiency Optimization (AEO) program, which is unique in offering our customers the opportunity to pick up where traditional plant asset-management programs typically may fall short. In simplest terms, the various programs and solutions under the AEO umbrella focus on enhancing the efficiency of plant and machinery assets at the heart of production processes.

An AEO program tailors a company's maintenance and reliability strategy to meet an organization's specific business goals—*things that continually change due to market or economic conditions*. The intent is to clarify existing reliability and maintenance practices and then move procedures upward on the efficiency scale toward optimum levels.

The first step is assessing the overall effectiveness of a reliability maintenance program and determining how well it aligns with current business objectives. An SKF team of specialists works with plant personnel to identify potential improvements that will yield the greatest returns. A comprehensive report provides improvement opportunities and a detailed strategy lays out recommended action steps.

Our experts then partner with the customer's maintenance and reliability professionals to help implement a viable plan and deliver the appropriate products and support, whether they're predictive or preventive maintenance practices, machine-condition monitoring, decision-support systems or any number of other capabilities in our toolbox. All are aimed to fine-tune reliability maintenance processes, reinforce an operation's overall business objectives, and carry maintenance activities to higher ground.

The AEO concept is just one in a portfolio of reliability-centered solutions uniquely developed by SKF to maximize operations for customers in all the various industries that we serve. For us through the years, helping to enhance the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of customer assets has become a highly worthwhile, valued and satisfying endeavor. We have learned much from solving customer challenges and then equipping customers with the knowledge and the tools that will benefit their operations in the long run.

In turn, we have found that customer relationships have grown ever stronger with deepening roots during our journey as partners in progress. **MT**

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