Times have been tough on manufacturing facilities lately. Machinery performance demands have never been higher. Critical equipment continues to age. Retiring workforces leave widening gaps in maintenance and engineering expertise. Everywhere, industry, has been forced to streamline and accomplish much more with much less.

Today's maintenance managers, in particular, have a difficult task. For a variety of reasons it may not always be possible to follow precision maintenance practices to the letter; equipment maintenance has become more complicated; environmental and safety regulations have grown increasingly strict. All the while, machine uptime must be maximized.

These factors have prompted many in management and maintenance to take a fresh look at how things have been done in the past—and how they can be done better in the future to help deliver required efficiencies and economies. To that end, they are considering how machinery components work together and, ultimately, influence overall equipment life. In other words, they are turning to "system approaches" instead of "quick fixes."

Great headway in this quest has been made through programs aimed at managing assets to optimize their efficiency. Benefits have accrued with positive effects on profits, productivity and quality. Yet, in some organizations, actually achieving asset efficiency and keeping machinery up-and-running still present major challenges.

Few companies inherently possess all the resources or expertise to implement the rapidly developing new technologies, processes and cultural changes needed for timely and long-term success. Some begin the process, but become hindered by an incomplete strategy or insufficient planning or benchmarking. Others may discover they lack required knowledge about individual (sometimes complex) components and the role each plays in machinery health.

As a leader on the global manufacturing stage for almost 100 years, our company enjoys a unique position, especially at a time when reliance on supplier know-how is universally recognized as one of the most practical, cost-effective means to extend internal competencies.

We have cultivated a tradition of significant investment in research and development and

remain committed to the application of new technologies and materials to enhance product design and quality. Close working partnerships with customers worldwide, too, have broadened our extensive insight about applications in virtually every industry.

Equipped with interrelated products and knowledge, we have taken our own "fresh" look at the industrial landscape and listened closely to customer concerns, interests and goals for multiple facilities and the single plant floor. We have thought long and hard about how we can respond with realistic "system solutions" incorporating all of our competencies to solve customer problems.

This process has led us to introduce strategic business "platforms" that are instantly meaningful (and useful) to all our customers, regardless of industry. These five platforms (Bearings and Units, Seals, Lubrication Systems, Mechatronics and Services) certainly enable us to communicate specific families of expertise. Moreover, they can be deployed not only to solve old problems, but to create new opportunities as well.

By enlisting diverse and synergistic expertise offering long-term reliability advantages, proactive maintenance managers can gain the ability to solve their immediate problems today—and think more practically about tomorrow. **MT**

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