TECH EDGE

HIGHLY SPECIALISED TECHNICAL CENTRES HELP VENDORS DISPLAY PRODUCT CAPABILITIES SO PROSPECTIVE CUSTOMERS CAN TEST OUT THEIR PROTOTYPES OR UNDERTAKE QUICK MACHINING BEFORE MAKING ANY SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT DECISIONS.

BY **BINDU GOPAL RAO**

"The cost of setting up the technical centre requires a good amount of investment in terms of infrastructure and also well-trained technical staff."
– Rajesh Ghashi

TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE HAS LONG BEEN recognised as an important driver of economic growth. Technical centres are no less than a centre of innovation, where the customer can witness new possibilities in rapidly progressing high-speed machining technology and design engineering. They are the new-age version of networking, strategically initiated to display component machining capability, optimised applications support and comprehensive training in close proximity to the customer. We find out more about how these facilities work.

ADVANTAGE TECHNOLOGY

Today, specialised technical centres play an important role in the machine tool industry as more and more process-oriented projects are being handled, which means that most customers ask for manufacturing solutions rather than just a machine tool.

"They want the machine tool supplier to provide a complete solution with commitment to quality and quantity, hence these technical centres are the places where the value addition on the machine tool takes place. Of course, we are also planning to have one in the near future," says **Rajesh Ghashi, MD, Chiron India Machine Tools**.

VVS Mani, director, operations, Unibic Foods, adds, "For FMCG products like ours, we do not have such centres ready, as of now. However, some of our business partners (machinery suppliers) are working towards having lines for certain products, which could be used for understanding the capabilities and also to test market some products in select regions etc., thereby cutting down the expenses of having to put up our own lines with huge investments, risk of idle capacities, and huge inventories of raw materials for full-fledged line capacities."

Since learning and development is crucial for industries to enhance competitiveness in manufacturing, empowering the industry professionals and fresh engineers with the latest technological developments through various training sessions and is becoming a necessity.

"IMTMA, Siemens, GE, to name a few, have already taken up initiatives in this direction. This will also boost the Government's Make in India initiative and create a pool of experts who can contribute in the success of this initiative. With the help of the Make in India drive, India is on the path of becoming the hub for hi-tech manufacturing," opines **Prasanna Samant, VP – IT, Grauer & Weil India**.

TECHNICAL CENTRES HELP IN LOCALISATION OF VALUE ADDITIONS.

1. High-performance 5-axis CNC machining centres can benefit various industries, including medical, aerospace, etc.

"Our business partners (machinery suppliers) are working towards having lines for certain products, which could be used for understanding the capabilities and also to test market some products in select regions etc."
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2. High-speed machining is a technology that is becoming a competitive necessity.

3. Unibic Foods welcomes such centres, which help cut down the expenses of having to put up their own lines.

TECH TALK

Tech centres play a significant role in enhancing critical customer input to machine tool manufacturing for the development and right application of technology. India has a very diverse topography, with specialised manufacturing needs requiring dedicated technological solutions, wherein the technology centres play a pivotal role.

Himanshu Shaparia, VP – sales, Jyoti CNC Automation, says, "Jyoti being technology centric, we have developed technology centres way back in 2004, the first being operational at our corporate headquarters. At present, we have our tech centres in major manufacturing hubs like Chennai and Bengaluru. The upcoming technology centres in Pune and Delhi will be operational by the end of the second quarter. This is the way forward to stay in tune with the rapid technological changes in the machine tool industry."

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Sandvik Coromant, India, is opening its new centre in Pune for productivity, application, machining and research in manufacturing. This Rs 27 crore investment aims to offer cutting-edge solutions and expertise to customers, including cutting-edge research and work on the future of global manufacturing. **Javier Guerra, president – India, Sandvik Coromant**, explains, "We are ready to customise in order to ensure that we meet the needs of our customers. We are working on process systems and we have a research roadmap in place."

DOING THE MATH

Technical centres for most of the machine tool companies, especially the non-Indian companies, help in localisation of value additions in terms of local-made peripherals like coolant systems, chip conveyors, fixtures, cutting tools etc., thereby bringing down the overall cost of the project, hence ultimately benefitting the end users.

"However, the cost of setting up the technical centre requires a good amount of investment in terms of infrastructure and also well-trained technical staff. It's more of an application centre where you integrate the machine with fixtures, tooling, part programming and prove outs with statistical analysis reports using CMM and other measuring devices. The technical

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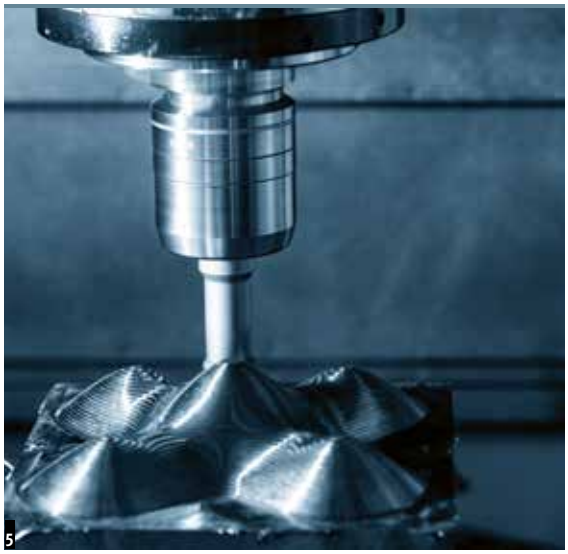

SUCH CENTRES WILL BENEFIT CUSTOMERS WITH MORE ECONOMICAL SOLUTIONS.

centre also acts as a training centre for customers, where you can provide various training on the customer machines itself," avers Ghashi.

Such centres have not come up in a big way in India for FMCG food products, however, for product trials in an R&D set up, many of the flavour and ingredient suppliers have set up product development centres, where reasonable infrastructure is available to take trials, iterate and finalise the products. A programme of technical and economic cooperation is essential for the development of relations with the other developing countries on the basis of partnership and cooperation for mutual benefit. It would also contribute to the evolution of the world community based on the inter-dependence in the attainment of their common goal for promoting the social and economic well-being of their people.

"Research and development today are equivalent to a business which focuses on creation of partnerships with the rest of the world to generate exploitable knowledge, technologies, new products and processes. In other words, it is about wealth creation in India, not only through international trade and business, but export of knowledge-based products and technologies. It emphasises a major transformation from 'perennial technology seekers' to 'technology providers'. Export of services like software is already an example. India's enormous potential has not been tapped so far," says Samant.

MAKING THE DIFFERENCE

High-speed machining is a technology that is becoming a competitive necessity, and not effectively implementing this technology could result in companies falling by the wayside in the highly competitive worldwide marketplace.

"Hence we believe that technological centers are one of the paramount junctions to display such technology in the Indian manufacturing context. In spite of the growth in the Indian manufacturing sector, a large section of the Indian manufacturing sector still relies on conventional technologies, which acts as barrier for their growth and falls short on competing in the global market. Looking at a customer's view, the machine tool is considered a capital goods investment and needs a proven solution to meet productive targets. Not all customers have equitable information, and misconceptions associated with modern trends and technology need to be wiped off through practical exposure. Tech centres are the exact answer to solve such issues and promote the right technology to the right segment with the right intent," adds Shaparia.

VALUE ADDS

Technical centres are a place of high regard for a company, because this is the place where you invite

4. Unibic Foods believes that such centres reduce chances of failures when it comes to the subsequent manufacture of such products at their own plants.

5. These centres also help in prototyping.

your customers for the final acceptance of the machine tool or to do the test cuts for your prospective customers. It is there to showcase your machine tool and also your expertise in providing custom solutions in the shortest possible time and reassure customers that there is a local support available for any kind of process-related consultation.

"Such centres will help business growth with a team which has been either trained or are empowering industry professionals with the latest technological developments through various training sessions. This, in turn, will also help retain customers or attract new customers, as they would prefer getting associated with an organisation which has a knowledgeable team and experts in their respective areas," explains Samant.

CHALLENGES & MORE

"The main challenge is to have the availability of technical skill and, for this, we need to train people extensively to attain the skill and knowledge on par with our principles. This takes a lot of time before you can go to your customers. This is the only major issue in operationalising the tech centre and, hence, a good amount of planning is required during the implementation stage," opines Ghashi.

Mani adds, "It may not be easy to extend such facilities to all product categories as the investments could vary and be huge for certain product segments. However, this is being explored by many business partners to improve their rate of success in winning orders for product lines, in a short time, thereby improving their revenues and profits. Trying to keep idle labour would be a challenge if the prototype line is not fully utilised."

LOOKING AHEAD

Going forward, it does seem that such centres will help in business growth, as the dependence on the parent company reduces with local support and they also benefit customers with more economical solutions. Such centers are being thought of as being beneficial especially when prototypes could be run and iterated as per specific needs, before finalising on the complete product line machinery.

"This reduces chances of failures in being able to smoothly manufacture such products subsequently at our own plants and also reduces the learning curve in terms of any complications of technology which needs fine tuning – both in terms of product as well as the plant and machinery," avers Mani.

The key, however, would be for the business partner to be willing to invest and network the prospective clients into appreciating the value provided, and such a strategy brings to the table the value that is originally envisaged for this concept. MT