

Competitive horizons

UK competitiveness at risk from poor knowledge of industry 4.0

Statistics jointly supplied by The Engineer and Subcon indicate that the limited awareness of Industry 4.0 within UK industrial firms could make engineering and manufacturing in the country less competitive. Over a third of professionals surveyed did not know about Industry 4.0, while another 19 per cent admitted to being unsure. Less than a quarter of respondents were confident in their knowledge of the technologies and systems involved. On the plus side, the report published by www.theengineer.co.uk did discover that ignorance was not hindering plans to invest in the latest technologies. At least 24 per cent of survey participants expressed an intention to spend in areas like automation, 3D printing and simulation and modeling over the coming year. The report also includes details of a comprehensive education initiative to help businesses increase their understanding of Industry 4.0 and better position themselves to gain a competitive edge from investments made.

Toy market buoyant in China

Stronger competition among the country's manufacturers fueled by industry developments has helped drive growth in China's toy sector, a report published by www.chinadaily.com.cn points out. In 2017, domestic sales increased by 16.2 per cent over the previous year to reach \$10 billion. Consumption was particularly strong among children aged up to 12 years old. With over 10,000 producers and around 6 million employees, China remains the largest producer and exporter of toys in the world. The report notes further encouragement for future performance is provided by a substantial increase in sales during 2017 of various child-related products. Purchases of car seats, buggies and feeding bottles all rose by between 16.8 per cent and 24.1 per cent.

Growth expected by plastics packaging manufacturers in Germany

A survey conducted by IK discovered that many producers of plastics packaging in Germany remain confident about growth prospects during the remainder of 2018. The trade association body found that increased turnover was anticipated by around 40 per cent of respondents, while a quarter of firms believed that exports would rise. Much of their optimism was driven by recent economic performance in the European Union (EU) region. Expectation of higher prices for raw materials does not appear to be dampening the rising confidence evident within the sector. Survey respondents also indicated growing consumer interest in using plastics from renewable sources. The report, as published by www.plasticseurope.com, points out that this provides scope to more actively promote consumption of such materials, particularly in the area of non-foods. Different customer industries have pledged to incorporate more recyclables within plastic packaging. However, commitment as yet has not transferred into comparable levels of action. In light of environment policies and targets by the EU, wider use of eco-friendly plastics would constitute a sensible move.

Soaring use of robotics has a downside for other industries

A report published by www.industryeurope.com notes that Japan, Singapore, South Korea, Germany and Sweden are among the nations driving the use of robotics. Sales have risen dramatically since 2010 and increased by an annual average of 12 per cent in the five years to 2016. One major consequence of this growth is the significantly greater demand for common components which are also used in various other industries. The impact is especially severe for bearings that distributors supply for manufacturers operating within sectors that include aerospace, optical equipment and medical equipment. Component shortages are beginning to affect producers worldwide as well as in countries leading the automation drive. According to the report, distributors are being forced to invest more in warehouse facilities and stockholding arrangements in order to ensure that customers can be adequately supplied with components. This need to enhance capabilities is set to intensify further as the robotics boom gains added momentum.