Is anyone ever going to agree on this economy?

You’re probably reading the same reports I am. Certainly, positive signs are popping up that the U.S. economy is moving forward again. I think we can all agree that things have picked up in the lubricants industry these last two years.

Yet, troubling signs linger. Employment isn’t growing as fast as we’d like. Many economists are warning of another recession slipping in. And regardless of who’s in power, America leaders just never seem to get around to tackling our massive debt problem, a financial sword of Damocles dangling over the necks of our children and probably grandchildren.

As leaders in U.S. industry, it’s the duty of STLE and its members to remain cautiously optimistic about our economic future. Business people are America’s true economic warriors, and a little good old-fashioned cheerleading never hurt anybody.

Still, we want to temper our optimism with smart business think-

Detroit is where the entire lubricants industry will plan the next business year. Make sure your company is included.

**KEY CONCEPTS**

- STLE’s Annual Meeting offers something of value for all of the society’s many member groups.
- STLE’s conference can add to corporate profitability or help an individual find a job.
- Cost for technical education led by the top lubrication researchers and industry professionals is just a little more than $100 a day.
a diverse membership. This diversity cross-pollinates our thinking, experiences and knowledge. If you’re a member, you’ll likely find yourself in one of these key demographics:

- Sales and Marketing: 40%
- Research/corporate R&D: 20%
- Senior management: 10%
- Engineering: 10%
- Consultant: 5%
- Maintenance: 5%
- Others: 10%.

Now let’s see how STLE’s meeting can help each group.

SALES & MARKETING

Take a look at our sales and marketing community. What are the key issues for this important group of STLE members?

First and foremost is to increase sales—that is job No. 1! How does someone in a sales position in our industry increase sales? Ask for the order? Certainly, but how does the sales rep get in the position to ask for that critical order?

He must first get access to the customer, and then he must present himself, his company and his products and services in a credible, informative way that positively differentiates him from the competition. To keep the sale, he must have the technical experience and skills to solve the problems encountered in the normal course of business: specification and quality documentation; shipping, handling and storage; condition monitoring; lube program management; best practices and troubleshooting to name just a few.

Attending STLE’s 2013 Annual Meeting & Exhibition can help salespeople get the order both directly and indirectly, depending on the individual’s particular business and resume.

Attendance helps directly by positioning the salesman in a neutral environment where he can encounter a number of potential customers in the halls, meeting rooms, commercial marketing forums and, of course, in the trade show. Each of these venues provides the aggressive sales rep with opportunities to talk with his customer, learn about his problems and needs, learn new solutions to those problems, make a presentation of the company’s products and services and, for certain, ask for the order.

Further, there are other companies present with whom the salesman might partner to facilitate or finalize the sale. Examples for a lubricant salesman might be condition monitoring service providers such as oil analysis labs, filtration companies, central lube system providers, consultants or similar support products or services.

Indirectly, attendance at STLE’s Annual Meeting & Exhibition helps the salesman get the order in a variety of ways. By participating in the society’s committees, education courses and similar peer-recognized activities, the sales rep can position himself as a credible individual in the industry.

Of course, what better way to accomplish this goal than by preparing for and taking one of STLE’s certification exams? STLE-certified individuals are known to command at least 10% higher salaries, according to a recent Lubes’N’Greases article, because these sales reps can and do get the order. The more certified individuals a company has on its payroll, the higher its expectation for increased sales and retention of current sales. These people typically have more direct people reporting to them, adding to their value. This makes such good business sense that it seems like just plain old common sense.

Attendance at STLE’s conference also can help companies prepare their employees for certification through STLE’s education and technical programs, while at the same time keeping them in front of their customers at the trade show booth and related opportunities. Additionally, salesmen can hone their presentation skills in the courses, technical program, Commercial Marketing Forum and trade show booth.

Finally, both sales reps and their sales managers can use the annual...
meeting to benchmark their products and services, booths, presentations, literature and the like, as well as through informational interviews with recognized industry leaders.

**R&D**

Let’s take a look at our research and development community. What are the important issues for this important segment of STLE’s membership? I’d say:

- Securing or retaining funding through presentation and publishing credible peer-reviewed research.
- Establishing a credible technical reputation.
- Staying at the cutting edge of research in the individual’s major areas of interest.
- Learning and developing ideas from discussion and interaction with peers.
- Assessing emerging technologies

Attendance at STLE’s Annual Meeting & Exhibition helps with these and related issues, both directly and indirectly. First, publishing in STLE’s journals, especially *Tribology Transactions*, and presenting the work to your peers directly establishes you as a cutting-edge researcher in the specific topic area. *Transactions* is an important, highly regarded industry journal with an impact that just keeps growing, thanks to the efforts of editor-in-chief Dr. Farshid Sadeghi and his team of associate editors.

It is equally important to listen to the presentations of other researchers to look for opportunities to collaborate with other groups better positioned to investigate some aspect of a given research problem. Again, strength and growth are the networking opportunities STLE offers.

In addition, the opportunity to talk with peers about their research provides a valuable opportunity to exchange ideas, explain the thinking behind assumptions used in developing project hypotheses and talk in greater depth about the problems and issues involved in an area of scientific study. All of these activities can directly affect the conduct of an individual’s research, leading to successful solutions to problems, development of new products and opportunities to publish.

STLE’s 2013 conference provides indirect opportunities as well. For example, interacting with the industrial community could result in future funding of a research project by a corporation seeking a more in-depth understanding of an area affecting its business.

Serving on technical and administrative committees helps to establish the researcher as a thought leader in the technical community. This visibility further makes it easier to attract future students for research programs, funding for future research and opportunities for collaboration. Showcasing students in activities like the student poster competition not only adds to an individual’s visibility and quality of research work but also provides an opportunity to benchmark one’s students with those of his peers and to evaluate potential future post-doctoral candidates.

Even the trade show, which most would say targets the industrial community, is popular with researchers, who enjoy viewing the latest testing services and test machines and expanding their corporate contacts. Taylor and Francis, STLE’s main publisher of books and *Tribology Transactions*, has a booth in the trade show, providing an opportunity to review new technical books and become involved with new publishing projects.

**SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

There are many reasons for top executives to attend STLE’s Annual Meeting. In fact, the list of key issues for senior managers attending STLE’s Annual Meeting is rather long.

First is the chance to benchmark your company versus industry standards and best practices. STLE is where you can see how your organizations matches up in such areas as corporate image, quality of employees, sales literature, research, presentations, products, services, trade show booth and overall company health and competitiveness.

Second is a chance to look to the future by seeking answers to questions such as: Is our research effort pointed in the right direction for the company’s long-term strategy? If not, is there technology that can be licensed or companies that would make good acquisition candidates? Are there people or consultants that should be hired? Are there research groups in academia that could be funded to handle the more advanced or long-term problems? What are the new market opportunities or niches that the company should enter? What is the regulatory environment? What new regulations are on the horizon?
Third, STLE’s Annual Meeting is a chance to develop credibility and industry relationships with actual and potential customers, vendors and thought leaders in the industry through serving on various STLE technical and administrative committees. Such relationships are an investment in the future to improve market awareness and to facilitate solving or resolving problems. Who knows, this might lead to hiring new people or getting another position.

CONSULTANCIES

Are you a consultant? Attendance at STLE’s Annual Meeting & Exhibition is a critical investment in time and money for this important part of the membership.

What are the critical issues for a consultant? Of direct benefit is participating in a conference where actual or potential customers attend. STLE’s Annual Meeting is a cost-effective way to meet with a large number of such people personally to review ongoing projects and/or talk about future projects.

Indirectly, attendance at STLE’s Annual Meeting & Exhibition increases the consultant’s marketplace visibility. Volunteering to serve on various technical and administrative committees further increases visibility and establishes credible relationships in a neutral environment. Presenting technical papers or teaching in education courses also establishes technical competence and increases your visibility as an industry expert.

Finally, most consultants need partnering relationships with any of a number of vendors of a variety of services. Again, attendance at STLE’s Annual Meeting provides a cost-effective opportunity to enhance these relationships and, in some cases, schedule tactical meetings with customers and service vendors.

JOB SEEKERS

Out of a job? Attending STLE’s Annual Meeting can help! According to Jeff Aulenbach, an International Coaching Federation-certified career coach, there are several things an individual can do to repackage himself or herself in the face of a job loss that STLE can and does provide. “The first is to hold information interviews—learn who the industry leaders are and what they consider important to the industry’s survival,” Aulenbach says. Where better than an STLE meeting to learn who these people are and to interact with them in the halls, discussion forums and trade show booths?

“Second, go to conferences where the industry leaders go to see and be seen and to develop relationships with key people,” he adds. Where better than an STLE meeting to learn who these people are and to interact with them in the halls, discussion forums and trade show booths?

“Third, if you can’t get on-the-job experience, participate in blogs and volunteer in associations and conferences,” Aulenbach says. Where better than an STLE meeting to participate with key people on committees and other service work? “Fourth, reach out to people who do the actual hiring, not just HR people,” he notes. Where better than an STLE meeting to learn who the people are who do the hiring and to interact with them in the halls, discussion forums and trade show booths?

“Fifth,” Aulenbach adds, “tap into your network of friends in the industry to find opportunities.” Where better than an STLE meeting to see your friends and to interact with them? Additionally, there are key search firm executives in our membership who regularly attend STLE meetings; networking with them would be a critical step in finding a new job. Also, as they get to know you better, they can be more effective in finding a fit. “Finally, create your own Website, Facebook or LinkedIn profiles as a way to stay visible and interact,” Aulenbach says. STLE’s Web site also has a Career Center where an individual can post his/her resume. In addition, STLE also has its own Facebook and LinkedIn pages, too.

There’s one postscript that needs to be added to all this. The cost for everything we’ve discussed is remarkably low. The annual meeting registration fee for an STLE member is just $580. That’s just a little more than $100 a day for technical education led by the world’s leading lubrication professionals. And don’t forget to throw in an unparalleled international networking opportunity.

So are there good business reasons for attending STLE’s 2013 Annual Meeting & Exhibition? No matter how the future unfolds, this one is a total no-brainer!