Everyone is concerned about the current economic situation both globally and in the U.S.

Some of us are concerned because our companies are or have announced major layoffs. Many are concerned about their futures because their company’s business is shifting from the U.S. and Europe to Asia, or their company is either acquiring other companies or being acquired, both of which lead to consolidation in some form. Others are concerned about lower consumer spending that leads to lower sales numbers and perhaps plant closings. Still others are concerned that with all the government debt, budgets for government-funded research and development will evaporate. Finally, new regulations also can create difficulties and challenges.

If you fall into any of the above categories, please keep reading. Following is a series of business reasons why members in specific business groups need to attend STLE’s 2012 Annual Meeting & Exhibition in St. Louis as a defense against some of these forces.

Whatever your business function, there’s something of value waiting for you in St. Louis next month.

KEY CONCEPTS

- The 2012 STLE Annual Meeting & Exhibition offers something of value for all of the society’s many member groups.

- STLE’s conference has many indirect benefits that 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.
**DIVERSITY A STRENGTH**

First, STLE is well known for one of its core strengths, a diverse membership. This diversity cross-pollinates our thinking, experiences and knowledge. Following is the demographic breakdown:

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

**SALES & MARKETING**

Let’s 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 company’s 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 2012 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, 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. This makes such good business sense that it seems like just plain old common sense.

Attendance at STLE’s Annual Meeting & Exhibition 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...
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.

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 journal in which to publish, as it is highly regarded in the industry and enjoys a very high cite rate compared to competitive journals.

For the researcher, it is probably equally important to listen to the research presentations of peers to look for opportunities for collaborative effort with other research groups better positioned to investigate some aspect of a given research problem.

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.

Further, STLE’s 2012 Annual Meeting & Exhibition 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 their 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.

Finally, the trade show has been popular with researchers, especially with regard to testing services and test machines, as well as learning about new products and expanding contacts with corporate people. Taylor and Francis, STLE’s main publisher of books and *Tribology Transactions*, has a booth in the trade show. This provides an opportunity to review new books on topics of interest and to learn about and become involved with new book projects.

**SENIOR MANAGEMENT**

Let’s take a look at this community, because there are many reasons for this group to attend STLE’s Annual Meeting. What are the key issues for senior managers that attendance at STLE’s Annual Meeting would help to address? The list is long.

First, almost obviously, is benchmarking versus industry standards, best practices and, of course, the competition for such things 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, are there new regulations on the horizon?

Third, STLE’s Annual Meeting is a chance to develop credibility and industry relationships with actual or 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 with both direct and indirect results.

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 visibility in the marketplace. 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 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 Web site, Facebook and 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 $565. 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 2012 Annual Meeting & Exhibition? To me, it is a total no-brainer!

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