

Real-time tool data is key to achieving higher productivity

The managing director of the presetting and measuring machine manufacturer E. Zoller GmbH talks about entering the tool management software business.

To increase productivity and save costs, manufacturers are shifting focus toward production organisation, especially tool management. E. Zoller GmbH & Co. KG, a manufacturer of presetting and measuring machines, thus has added to its portfolio Zoller Tool Management (TM) software for providing real-time tool data in production settings. Alexander Zoller, the managing director of E. Zoller GmbH, sat for an interview on the potential, applications and benefits of Zoller TM.

ETMM: *E. Zoller is very successful in the field of presetting and measuring machines. What made you decide to enter the software sector?*

Alexander Zoller: We had already presented software for tool management in 1973 at the international IHA exhibition. It ran on a Commodore V64 system. Since then, we have been developing software that is supplied with our presetting and measuring machines. What is new is that we now also market tool management software without the machines. To this end, we decided to establish a separate sales organisation nearly two years ago, which is completely divorced from the presetting and measuring machine sales organisation.

Tool management is offered by several CAD/CAM companies. Can the Zoller software deliver more? How does it differ from conventional solutions?

The deciding factor for Zoller TM is that the tool data is stored once and can then be used by various departments with different programming systems. In practice, we have often discovered that the tool manage-



ment of a programming system provides tool data for programming only in theory: the real tools needed for manufacturing are missing. Zoller TM combines theoretical and actual tools.

In addition to saving tool costs, do you promise a reduction in machine downtime when Zoller TM is used?

Indeed, because a main advantage of Zoller TM is that it lets you plan ahead. For example, if linked to the various machine controls, the Zoller Flash module will alert the operator when tools need to be replaced in the machine, thus ensuring that replacement tools are available just in time for the next planned change. In addition to reducing machine downtime, this module can optimise tool life.

Several CAM suppliers use the Zoller database for its information content. This makes sense for simulation purposes or for collision control in 5-axis

machining. But does this also mean that one transfers warehousing and tool management to Zoller?

In today's world, a large number of companies operate with different tool databases. There is one database for the programming system, one for the tool warehouse, one for the presetting and measuring machine—and an ERP system is also in use. These various systems all require considerable effort to maintain, if it is done at all. With Zoller TM, we therefore provide a tool database that can be used by different departments, drastically reducing maintenance requirements.

Besides tool costs and machine downtime, Zoller TM reduces your organisational expenditure.

The problem of interfaces can be nightmarish. How do you expect to close the gaps between CAM system, warehouse management, presetting, measuring and machine with Zoller TM?

Nightmares usually occur when

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Alexander Zoller, managing director of E. Zoller GmbH

interfaces are not defined or when companies make promises which they unfortunately cannot deliver. In our Pleidelsheim head offices and at our subsidiary in Hannover, we conduct "Lunch & Learn" workshops that demonstrate the tool cycle. We give interested parties suggestions and solutions for efficient manufacturing. We do not discuss what tool replacement ought to be like: we talk about actual replacement with various programming systems and machine controls.

You offer software modules at three levels. Which is best suited for what type of company?

Using Zoller TM definitely requires some restructuring within the organisation. The changeover starts with an analysis of the tool pool and building up a tool database. This can only be done step by step and is not achieved overnight. That is why the modules are designed to accompany the process step by step.

All companies, be they small or

large, start with one module and expand progressively. The modules always pay for themselves. It just depends on how much money a company wants to earn month by month with Zoller TM.

E. Zoller implies that the use of TM can generate up to 20% savings in tool costs. How is this possible?

First, Zoller Tool Management reduces the tool pool. In future, companies know which tools are being used and which are not. One can also determine whether the promised tool lives are being realised. In addition, the right tools are provided to the right machines, minimising tool search times. This means more profit, month after month.

E. Zoller recently introduced new presetting and measuring machines and inspection units. What can we expect in the near future?

In measuring technology, the trend is clearly toward virtual tool measurement. Today, for example, you

can enter a tool manufacturer's 3D tool data into a virtual inspection unit. That means you can define measuring programme sequences during tool design, or check and define tolerances. In the field of presetting and measuring machines, we will be showing a number of special applications.

What are E. Zoller's target markets besides component manufacturers and tool and mould makers? Are there trends here?

Zoller and its products are present in all industries employing cutting technology in their manufacturing processes. Medical engineering, the aerospace and automotive industries, the energy sector—these industries and others are experiencing pronounced growth. Zoller TM is bound to offer them considerable benefits in the verification and documentation of tools, particularly in medical engineering and aerospace.

Zoller continues to develop and assemble in Germany. Will this allow you to stay competitive?

Our local sales and service organisations in the most relevant export markets, such as the USA and China, are well acquainted with the requirements of those markets, so our engineers and the development department in Germany respond to them promptly and reliably. At present, there is no reason for transferring development or assembly capacities out of Germany in order to remain competitive.

E. Zoller GmbH & Co. KG
Pleidelsheim, Germany
www.zoller.info

