

Manufacturing support – what’s on the menu?

A recent survey conducted by Gambica has revealed low levels of awareness in the manufacturing sector of many Government schemes intended to support industry. Steve Brambley, deputy director of Gambica*, outlines what’s being done to improve matters.

I’m willing to bet that most readers of this column are supporters of manufacturing in the UK and would be delighted to see it grow, both in size and in its contribution to the economy. Some of you may be manufacturers, others automation vendors, distributors, integrators and installers. In this symbiotic relationship, automation drives growth in manufacturing and, in turn, manufacturing growth expands the need for automation.

The good news is that the government agrees, with policy decisions continuing to get behind various support schemes aimed at both the manufacturing and automation industry. Many of these support schemes take the approach of providing much-needed funding, either directly or via tax benefits. Other schemes provide resources, training or advice through approved services. I would say they are all essential tools that provide support across an array of needs to help boost manufacturing in the UK.

However, there is a problem. Not with the schemes themselves, but with the awareness, promotion and uptake of the schemes. It’s like a restaurant that has an impressive menu with something for everyone, but not enough people know it is there or how to find it. The result? Not enough customers making the most of what is on offer.

Gambica recently carried out a survey to gather some data on awareness levels of 18 schemes that are relevant to manufacturing, having previously only had anecdotal evidence that awareness levels needed to improve. Most people that we surveyed were aware of fewer than nine of these schemes, with half of the people we asked knowing about five or fewer.

You can see the results of the Gambica survey and get more information on each of the government schemes by visiting: www.gambica.org.uk/ManufacturingSupport

The survey was carried out in conjunction with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and has resulted in them chairing a forum of stakeholder organisations (including Gambica) with the aim of improving awareness levels across the manufacturing community. This is great news and puts the wide reach of a diverse set of associations, institutions and organisations at the disposal of government.

It is early days. The forum met for the first time in November 2013, but already some

good suggestions are being put forward, one of which is a BIS-produced “white label” flyer. This is a one-page document for stakeholders to distribute to members which signposts some of the most relevant schemes. Sounds like that much-needed menu to me.

The key issue to address is effective communication. What is the message, who is the audience, and what are the channels to deliver the message to that audience? There are significant questions to answer behind that: How do you reach the vast numbers of small businesses? How do you penetrate the many layers of large businesses? Where do manufacturers go to for support? What is the balance of media needed between print, verbal, digital and social?

Following the questions on communicating, there is then the next phase – engagement. Do small businesses have the capacity to participate? Are the qualifying criteria understandable? Is the administration straightforward?

It is pleasing to see that BIS is rising to this challenge and is involving a wide number of stakeholders to take it on. I look forward to being able to play my part in spreading the word.

In the meanwhile, why not take a look at some of the items on the menu below? If you want more details, you can find them at www.greatbusiness.gov.uk ■

AMSCI (Advanced Manufacturing Supply Chain Initiative)	Apprenticeships Service	Automating Manufacturing Initiative	Business Bank	Catapults for High Value Manufacturing	Employer Ownership of Skills Pilot
Enhanced Capital Allowances	Green Investment Bank	Growth Accelerator	Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS)	Patent Box	R&D Tax credits
SMART grants	Talent Retention Solution (TRS)	TSB: Enhancing Manufacturing through automation scheme	UK Export Finance (Export Credits Guarantee Department)	UKTI (International Trade Advisors)	UTCs (University Technical Colleges)



* Gambica is the trade association for the automation, control, instrumentation and laboratory technology sectors in the UK. For more information, please contact the deputy director, Steve Brambley, on 020 7642 8090 or via sbrambley@gambica.org.uk or www.gambica.org.uk