

## **Building U.S. Manufacturing Strength**

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Douglas K. Woods, President of The Association For Manufacturing Technology, discusses the state of U.S. manufacturing, job development, and what the industry can expect going forward. While today's manufacturing industry is more sophisticated and high tech than ever before, he says, the industry still needs to address some critical issues to be successful in the future.

### **Q: In terms of job numbers and unemployment in the manufacturing sector, how is the state of manufacturing faring today?**

**A:** Woods: Since the recession, manufacturing has been the driver for recovery and continuing economic growth. The Institute of Supply Management's Purchasing Managers' Index has held steady above 50 since last November, indicating expansion within the manufacturing economy, although April's PMI of 50.7 was the lowest PMI of 2013. Manufacturers have shown a commitment to investing in new technology and equipment, with 2012 seeing the highest technology order total in 13 years, according to the U.S. Manufacturing Technology Orders report.

U.S. manufacturers are still facing great difficulty in finding qualified candidates for their increasingly high-skilled and high-tech job openings. At a time when the unemployment rate in the U.S. has been hovering around 8 percent for more than 40 months in a row, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports there are about 300,000-plus unfilled positions in manufacturing at this time. The concern becomes greater as U.S. companies look to bring back more of their manufacturing operations from overseas locations, while foreign companies look to shift production here as well. Couple those statistics with the fact that the average age of highly skilled U.S. manufacturing employees today is 56 and you can see why some

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experts predict the number of unfilled positions could swell to between 2 million to 5 million by the end of the decade.

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