



Skills Gap

5 Key Benefits of Joining a Metalworking Industry Group

Julie Sullivan | Sep 19, 2017

What You Need to Know:

Metalworking organizations are a great way for associates to connect and learn from one another in a group setting.

The communities give members access to top metalworking industry events.

Members can use metalworking and machining associations to keep up-to-date with emerging technologies and new skills.

Importantly, many groups address the need to fix the blatant skills gap that plagues the metalworking industry.

There are very good career reasons to join a metalworking industry organization or association. Find out why.

Think an industry machining or metalworking group is a waste of your time or money (or both)? Think again.

Sometimes it might help to know people from another part of the country or globe who are doing similar work as you. You may discover if they are experiencing the same headaches and successes as you. It may even lead to a new job or new business partnership—or it could allow you to share your on-the-job knowledge and expertise with others, say industry and association advocates.

"I'm surprised by the lack of people who belong to associations," *pens* Patrick Hull, a serial entrepreneur, in the Forbes article "Invest in Yourself and Trade Associations." Hull has launched many companies across vertical industries in transportation, technology, energy and others over the past 28 years. He views membership and participation in industry associations as a worthy educational and business endeavor.

"Benjamin Franklin once stated that an investment in knowledge pays the best interest," notes Hull. "I couldn't agree more ..."

Enter: metalworking industry organizations. Ranging from job-specific, customized classes to services that specialize in educating up-and-coming machining professionals, these communities build camaraderie and expose metalworkers to new areas while allowing peers to share knowledge. Here are

five reasons why you, your colleagues and your company could benefit from membership and participation in industry organizations.

1. Build Your Network Through Professional Associations and Events

Although industry organizations for metalworking provide associates with a wide breadth of benefits (from skill-building to mentoring new generations of machining professionals), one of the key benefits of joining a metalworking community is the access to top industry networking events.

“This might seem obvious, but associations offer the chance to connect with others in your industry,” notes Hull. “I’ve engaged in a number of lucrative business relationships through association memberships. You can learn from others in your industry and could even create alliances or partnerships.”

The National Tooling and Machining Association encourages members to make connections through **top events** when individuals join NTMA.

Some of the most prominent (and upcoming) events in the United States:

- **The American Manufacturing Strategies Summit:** The agenda focuses on advanced lean operations for faster output.
- **FABTECH:** Top suppliers showcase their latest products and developments.
- **Metalcon International:** Metal professionals mingle and exchange best practices while suppliers put their latest products on display.
- **Advanced Design & Manufacturing:** The largest gathering of design and manufacturing professionals in North America.

2. Use Your Professional Network to Refine Your Metalworking Skills

You can, in fact, always be learning new things—and industry organizations can help. Refining your craft in metalworking and machining is a continuously evolving process. Whether it’s getting trained on the latest machine or perfecting your technique, most metalworking and machining organizations offer some type of skill-building component for members.

It’s a premise that drives **Tooling U-SME’s** core approach. The service works directly with manufacturing companies to identify (and subsequently address) specific needs or obvious skill gaps within the workforce. And from online interactive courses to in-person instructor-led seminars and certifications, the “university” is certainly malleable enough to fit even the most confining or demanding schedules from associates.

“I’ve found that the educational resources alone pay for my membership ... Educational topics can include trends, best practices, new techniques, etc.,” notes Hull. “Some associations will even provide training programs and materials for employees. I’ve received at least a dozen cost-saving tips over the years from association conferences and newsletters, meaning they’ve more than paid for themselves.”

3. Keep Pace with New Industry Trends and Research

The metalworking, machining and tooling community is a continuously changing world. Whether it’s evolving technological trends in CNC, **additive**, CAM/CAD and other metallurgy and machining innovations, it helps to have industry organizations, suppliers, tool and machine manufacturers and peers at events, seminars and associations to review and reflect on the latest and greatest trends.

Many of these industry organizations also publish their own research on specific markets or trends, including wage and salary reports—to help keep their members apprised and aware of key data points and industry shifts before they are happening on a larger scale—so workers and companies alike can be prepared and informed.

The NTMA, for example, publishes its “Wage & Fringe Benefit Report” for its members that “examines high, low and average wage rates for 37 job functions,” giving you an idea of the range of “competitive plant wages in your NTMA chapter, your region, by sales size and by line of business.” Here is an **example** from 2014 (that the organization uses as a sample to persuade members to participate).

“Many associations conduct market research and analysis on their specific industries,” Hull says. “White papers and research reports can offer great insights and have helped me stay ahead of others. By pooling resources from members, these associations can provide materials that benefit everyone in the group.”

Another key thing to note: Many industry associations also perform advocacy on behalf of members for government and legislative policy—publishing papers and performing media outreach campaigns for overall industry support.

4. Address the Skill Gap (and Boost Your Earning Potential)

As your team is likely already well aware, despite a surge in hiring there continues to be a tangible, glaring skills gap spread across the manufacturing industry. In other words, new hires aren’t equipped to handle the influx of increasingly complex equipment. And companies are in short supply of the manufacturing, machining, engineering and machine programming skills they need.

“You’ll find that 70 percent of the population needs skills or a certificate. And I don’t see us addressing that as a nation. And when we look at 300 million people in the United States and 1.3 billion in China and 1 billion in India, you better start paying attention to what you’re doing with your human capital,” says Tom Humphries, president and CEO of the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce in eastern Ohio in an interview with *U.S. News & World Report*. “We know now we’re not meeting the demands of the employer.”

To address this, a number of manufacturing organizations either have training, seminars or conferences available to bring new hires (and experienced ones, too) up to speed on the latest industry developments, or they’re doing their part to better educate the next generation of manufacturers.

For example, The Foundation of the Fabricators & Manufacturers Association, International has a student-driven society called “*Nuts, Bolts & Thingamajigs*,” where budding assemblers are taught valuable lessons in leadership, manufacturing and teamwork through summer camps and scholarships.

If it’s a new piece of equipment you (or your associates) need to be trained on, Tooling U-SME also offers **custom-designed classes** that can hone in on a particular piece of equipment.

Of course, if it’s your own current associates who need better training, consider enlisting them in a seminar or course. The Precision Metalforming Association offers a variety of technical programming **courses** in various locations across the United States.

“We know now we’re not meeting the demands of the employer.”

Tom Humphries, on the manufacturing industry skills gap
President and CEO of the Youngstown/Warren Regional Chamber

5. Learn from Professional Connections

A number of metalworking industry associations and organizations have “peer groups,” or small communities where peers in similar jobs form a group to learn from one another and share best practices in their field. The Chemical Coaters Association International, for example, provides *peer group opportunities* for members.

The groups generally meet at regular intervals throughout the year (often quarterly or annually), sharing presentations, best practices and swapping successful methods for elevating their current metalworking and machining tactics. Often, peers are required to sign confidentiality agreements to keep trade secrets within the group—and allow community peer members to collaborate and share information without fear of damaging their companies or competitors.

Not sure where to start? Hull advises trying to find the right association for you:

“[C]onsider asking colleagues and competitors what associations they’re involved in. Look at your local newspaper and event calendars to see which associations are the most active in your area. If you find one that looks like a good fit, I’d recommend contacting some existing members to ask them about their experiences.”

Have you or your colleagues joined a metalworking industry organization? Why or why not? Let us know in the comment section below.

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