



Industry Leading

THE ONSET OF CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19) HAS PRESENTED UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES FOR TRADE BODIES TO CIRCUMNAVIGATE THROUGH THE HEALTH EMERGENCY AND POLITICAL TURMOIL. MEM CAUGHT UP WITH DAVID HARRISON, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER OF THE PPMA GROUP OF ASSOCIATIONS, TO FIND OUT HOW THE PPMA IS HELPING ITS MEMBERS THROUGH THE ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY.

Since the founding of the Processing and Packaging Machinery Association (PPMA), can you explain a little of the history and background of the Association for our readers?

Association for our readers?

The PPMA was incorporated in 1987 by eight founding member companies, born out of a desire to run an exhibition 'for the industry by the industry'.

The Association was recognised for its industry standing within just a couple of years, following the success of the first PPMA Show at Telford International Centre in 1988, which attracted no less than 3,000 visitors, coupled with the launch of Machinery Update the following year. Both are now "industry lead-

ing" with the trade events and UK publishing sector.

By 1997, demand to exhibit at the PPMA Show had more than quadrupled. This prompted the need to relocate the show to the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham, which welcomed 10,000 visitors and filled the venue's largest hall (no. 5) with the latest innovations from across the processing and packaging industry.

Fast forward to 2009, the PPMA was joined by the secretariat of the British Automation and Robot Association (BARA) and, in 2010, UK Industrial Vision Association (UKIVA). This brought about three distinct individual associations under the trading brand umbrella of the PPMA Group of Associations.

In more recent times, the Group has set-up and funded PPMA Business Education Skills Training (PPMA BEST) – a registered charity (1156041) to help support companies to employ an apprentice through grant funding. The PPMA has also expanded to its own training provision to member companies through the launch of a new PPMA Academy, in conjunction with Make UK.

As a Group of Associations, the PPMA has in-excess of 500-member companies, and is recognised by the Government's Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Department for International Trade (DIT) for its work in the UK and supporting companies wishing to exhibit overseas.

How does the PPMA represent members' interest?

An economic crisis has the propensity to bring people together. Trade associations across the manufacturing sector have certainly played an important role; especially during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, as they can provide a timely source of information.

The PPMA was already actively engaged with its members before the UK went into lockdown in March 2020; and while the composition and sharing of information must continually reflect our members' needs, our principal focus is unwavering. We always remain true to our roots and recognise the importance to be member centric.

The PPMA has always been an advocate for providing mutual beneficial networking opportunities. We recognise that some companies are competitors, but there is always a common place from which they can both do business and prosper.

First and foremost, we are a trade body; however, we have over 30 years' expertise in event management and publishing which stands the Association in good stead today. This has enabled PPMA to develop a sense of belonging, as well as being a dynamic and responsive industry body that members can rely on.

What does the PPMA offer in terms of support?

All trade associations have to move with the times, and the PPMA is no different; whether it be through the technical and regulatory training we offer, or supporting our PPMA BEST charity to help more companies and young people through grants and bursaries.

We are acutely aware of the need to have a voice into the heart of Government, which we facilitate through political lobbyists, such as MAKE UK. The PPMA

also sits on the council of Export Partners UK to help fly the flag for British exporters.

At the same time, we are actively engaged with the likes of BEIS and Make UK to represent our members' interests who import goods into the UK. This is important, particularly after the UK left the EU in January, and with the added complications resulting from Covid-19.

Can you explain the PPMA's mission and how this applies to the world we find ourselves in 2020?

Our primary objective is to help our members to sell more products and services across a range of industry sectors. Covid-19 has certainly challenged the status quo, but we do not deviate from our core strengths, which is to help our members achieve the best outcomes at all times through the products and services that we offer.

Arguably, the most valuable tool we have at present is the ability to source and impart relevant business information to help members make informed decisions through the current Covid-19 pandemic and prepare for the end of the transition period.

We were also pleased to launch our free-to-use PPMA Show Meeting Hub in September, which connects over 300 exhibitors and prospective buyers online.

What products and services do BARA and UKIVA provide under the PPMA Group of Associations?

BARA is the voice for the UK robotics industry when interfacing with the UK Government and other trade bodies.

As an Association, BARA aims to match members' needs with prospective buyers within, predominately, the automotive, food, beverage and pharmaceutical sectors.

BARA provides a focal point for the industry to talk with external stakeholders, such as Government officials and end users of robots; to interface with the wider industry and how robotics and automation can benefit them.

More recently, BARA has partnered with the Robotic Industry Association (RIA) in the USA to bring about the RIA / BARA Certified Robot Integrators' Scheme, which benchmarks UK companies against a vigorous set of industry standards from which to demon-

strate technical knowledge, processes, competencies and quality control systems in place.

Similarly, UKIVA is the voice for the UK industrial vision industry. Through the advancement of machine vision technology, UKIVA has experienced a substantial period of growth, aided by the launch of the first Machine Vision Conference & Exhibition in 2017, which continues to prosper year-on-year.

Vision technology already provides imaging-based inspection and analysis for a variety of industries. Government and road traffic agencies are already big adopters of the technology, which will continue to grow as industrial vision becomes more sophisticated.

Are there any events that readers should bookmark for 2021?

Following the postponement of all largescale events this year, we are pleased to confirm that our Machine Vision Conference & Exhibition has been rescheduled until 11 May 2021 and our flagship PPMA Show until 28-30 September 2021. Information on both events is available via www.ppma.co.uk

