

The Future: Let's Create it TODAY!

When the impact of the recession hit in 2009, we were faced with the challenge of surviving. Now, as the economy continues to recover, we find ourselves faced with an even greater challenge—positioning metal buildings as the first-choice construction solution. Too many groups of key influencers, such as architects, engineers and insurance agencies, do not recognize the positive impact and benefits that our products provide. This constrains the metal building system industry's opportunity to grow.

What's Good about Today?

Those of us who work in the industry know the metal building systems market is strong and stable, and we are encouraged to see sales and shipments are growing. In addition, industrial, warehousing, commercial and mixed-use markets are increasing—stronghold markets for metal buildings. New markets are opening, especially around the energy and oil shale boom sites in Texas, Minnesota, Kansas and the Dakotas. The U.S. economy appears to have stabilized and is now slowly rising. We expect this trend to continue over the next few years.

Keys to the future of the metal building systems industry:

- **Leverage our technical capabilities**
- **Elevate the industry's perception**
- **Advance sustainability**
- **Stimulate innovation**

There are also good things going on for the metal building market in the general economy. Interest rates are low and should stay that way for the next year or two; inflation is benign; borrowing is getting easier; the capital goods market is strong; firms are expanding their capacity to meet demand; and the stock market is near a record high. Combined, we believe all of these factors will contribute to a steady pace of growth through 2017.

The metal building industry is leveraging this and increasing market share.

By Brad Robeson



On the Flip Side

While the economy has stabilized in the U.S., we still need greater growth in capital spending, wages and employment to enhance personal and corporate spending, and build the economy. But we need to be wary of the unknown. For example, we do not know what the impact will be of the Affordable Care Act and what it will mean for businesses and employees. We also have to be mindful of the cost of borrowing capital, which will increase over the next few years. In much of the rest of the world, economic recoveries have been sluggish, and 2014 is still a recovery year in Europe. While international issues are not generally a concern for U.S. metal building systems manufacturers, they are a concern to our customers who do business globally. The effects of other countries' economies may well influence their building decisions here at home.

Planning Ahead for Future Success

There are some issues that might make the metal building industry appear vulnerable, but those threats can actually become opportunities. Here are five key issues that every firm in the metal building systems industry must consider as we think about the future:

- Other materials and forms of construction are focusing on technical advancements in framing and


design as well as trying to out-promote steel in the marketplace. However, steel remains the most durable, sustainable and resilient construction framing option, and the more we promote its attributes to owners and developers, the more they'll understand why steel is usually the logical choice.

- The rising cost of steel might seem a disadvantage when compared to other materials; however, the cost of all construction materials is rising and we need to help educate clients so they will focus on value, sustainability and resilience over price.

- As activity in the construction industry continues to grow, finding and retaining the talent necessary for success has become a greater challenge than ever before. However, this is a golden opportunity for us to become more engaged with colleges, universities and technical schools, and to educate the next generation about metal building systems and the huge impact they will have on the built environment in the decades ahead.

- MBMA is spearheading efforts to influence code decisions, but we need others to help the groundswell grow. Codes and standards can be our ally with respect to leveling the playing field for all forms of construction, but constant vigilance and participation is required so that metal buildings are treated fairly and appropriately.

Educate, Innovate and Elevate

We, as an industry, must stand united to educate, innovate and elevate the perception of metal buildings so we can effectively achieve new measures of growth and success. It will take the combined effort to deliver the caliber of leadership and action that will drive the results we need to position the industry for greater market share. It is up to us to take our industry to new heights and experience unprecedented achievement. We can do it; but we must work together. Contact MBMA at mbma@mbma.com, and get active in making a difference! The future can be strong, but only if we work decisively together to make it happen. Our future is what we make it. 

Brad Robeson is chairman of the Metal Building Manufacturers Association. For more information, visit www.mbma.com.