Things change fast these days. It’s just over 200 years since Englishman Henry Maudsley gave birth to the modern machine tool industry, and for 150 years or so it was a mechanically based technology, with perhaps one of the greatest innovations being the move from belt-drive from a common power source to independent drive via electric motors. However, since the 1950s, with the advent of Numerical Control (subsequently CNC), it has been the computer and electronics technologies that have underpinned machine tool developments.

As consumer electronics/computer developments arise, so they subsequently find their place in the industrial world: LCD screens on CNCs; the latest digital signal processing technology from mobile phones supporting, for example, Newall Measurement Systems’ latest technology (see page 81); mobile phone text messages reporting machine condition; or the Internet delivering software to CNC units (Tornos).

In addition to technology-driven change, however, the machine tool industry is more and more affected by globalisation: for which read a shrinking world through easy communication/travel; a lowering of trade/investment barriers with subsequent mobility of manufacturing activities as companies seek the lowest cost environment to service existing markets or a location in or close to growing markets of newly industrialised countries; and industry consolidation leading to increased global presence.

On globalisation, Boston Consulting Group said in 2004: “High-cost countries can now source virtually anything on the other side of the globe at much lower cost and get equivalent quality...no major industrial category will be immune from the globalisation of cost structures”. In the ‘moving early, growing fast’ group, unsurprisingly, it placed ‘computers and [computer] peripheral equipment’. In the ‘globalising slowly’ quadrant was placed ‘metalworking machinery’.

Now while failures, mergers, acquisitions and plant moves are nothing new in the machine tool world, since the last MACH exhibition in 2004 the globalisation-led changes of machine tool companies seem to have accelerated or become more explicit or visible. Our lead feature reviews recent events and, of course, the results will be there for you to see at this year’s MACH show.