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Austmine 2009: the dawn of a new mining era

A mining boom characterised by rapidly escalating costs and the growing realisation that resources needed to feed production growth – people, skills, materials and energy – are finite, is over. A new era beckons, one in which technology plays a central role in controlling costs. A preview of that era, mining’s technology age, will be delivered in Adelaide, South Australia, in November 2009.

Austmine 2009, to be held on November 10-11, in Australia’s new mining boom state, will provide unique insights into the technologies and technology providers starting to transform the mining landscape, according to Austmine chairman Alan Broome.

“Technology will be the major difference in the next boom,” Broome said.

“The technology age of mining brings a new focus on predictable cost, safety and quality outcomes. What the members of Austmine have seen from our travels over the past 2-3 years is that the world’s big miners recognise Australia as being at the heart of the technological revolution that will make the next mining boom very different to what we’ve seen in the past 30 years.”

Originally scheduled for March this year, but postponed due to the fallout of the GFC, the biennial Austmine conference is a major international networking event for mining technology and service providers, and the world’s mining and contract mining companies. As with the two previous Austmine conferences in Queensland and Western Australia, Austmine 2009 in SA will draw delegations from leading mining corporations around the globe.

Austmine, the Australian Mining Equipment and Services Export Association, has more than 100 member companies exporting Australian produced mining technologies, products and services to over 80 countries. Members are forecast to export about \$AU3.8 billion worth of equipment and services in 2009.

Adelaide-based Austmine director, and managing director of SA manufacturer Korvest, Alexander Kachellek, said mining’s looming paradigm change had already occurred in the manufacturing, automotive and fabrication industries.

“I came away from a recent tour of WA’s north-west with the feeling that, yes the impact of the GFC was severe and untimely for many, but in mining the lead-up to it was just crazy and people were past the stage of thinking, we could not have done everything we planned to do anyway,” he said.

Media Enquiries:

Austmine Limited

140 Arthur Street | North Sydney NSW 2060 | AUSTRALIA

Phone: +61 2 9458 7393

Email: robert.trzebnski@austmine.com.au

Web: www.austmine.com.au



“It was going to cost more and more money – every time you thought of something or added something to a project it was just going to escalate. Now I think companies realise you can’t just throw money at it; resources are finite, meaning people, expertise and even equipment, and so you have to be smarter.

“I actually see it a bit like the evolution of manufacturing, where the original manufacturers who looked to increase production threw people at it; volumes increased, and more people were added. And then some of the companies got smart and said, why don’t we automate these areas where we can take away the dependence on people, and also improve quality and safety.

“I’ve been in manufacturing for many years and seen and lived that sort of evolution.”

Austmine 2009 will feature a provocative two-day conference program, and an exhibition. More than 300 delegates are expected to attend.

Alan Broome said companies such as Rio Tinto, Vale, Codelco and Xstrata were all pursuing innovative ways to better position themselves for future commodity cycles.

“The technology age of mining is going to be all about doing it a lot smarter – maximising productivity and safety using technology, not toolbox talks; maximising the way in which you use technology to, if you like, make sure that you’ve got the most efficient, the least resource-intensive operation, that you can,” he said.

“People are looking for solutions and Australia’s mining technology and service sector is currently exporting them all over the world. We are also, through the likes of Rio Tinto in WA, Xstrata in Queensland, and Newcrest in New South Wales, pushing the technology envelope in many different ways.

“So with that setting, combined with the pipeline of projects that has resulted from South Australia’s highly successful exploration program, we are very optimistic about the timing of Austmine 2009 and see that with economic conditions and financial markets stabilising, our timing will be quite good.”

By Order of the Board

Robert Trzebski

Executive Officer

Media Enquiries:

Austmine Limited

140 Arthur Street | North Sydney NSW 2060 | AUSTRALIA

Phone: +61 2 9458 7393

Email: robert.trzebski@austmine.com.au

Web: www.austmine.com.au