



Access Is Becoming Manufacturing's Competitive Advantage, According to Xometry's 2027 U.S. Manufacturing Outlook

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AI, capacity, suppliers, and skills are becoming the resources that define who wins in manufacturing next year, and access beyond the factory walls is the key to unlocking them

- **Manufacturing's AI payoff is upstream:** Manufacturers see the biggest impact in manufacturability, costing, and quality control, not on the factory floor.
- **America's idle industrial capacity is hiding in small shops:** Smaller manufacturers have far more room to run than larger ones, if they can meet certification requirements.
- **Supplier optionality is becoming a competitive advantage:** With prices rising and pushback low, buyers are leaning on supplier access instead.
- **Manufacturing needs skills, not just headcount:** AI and automation operators are now the hardest role to fill, and higher pay alone isn't solving it.

NORTH BETHESDA, Md., Oct. 01, 2026 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- [Xometry Inc.](#) (NASDAQ:XMTR), the global AI-native marketplace connecting buyers and suppliers of custom manufacturing, today released its second annual [Manufacturing Outlook report](#), a forward-looking analysis of the forces shaping the manufacturing industry for 2027.

The Manufacturing Advantage is Shifting

The 2027 Manufacturing Outlook—based on proprietary research with manufacturing executives across the U.S., along with insights from Xometry and external subject matter experts—points to a shift in the manufacturing advantage, traditionally built around a company's assets. Increasingly, what matters is what a company can *access*: capacity beyond its own walls, qualified suppliers when conditions change, and AI-driven intelligence that extends the expertise of its existing workforce.

"AI is moving earlier into the manufacturing process, and the skills our industry needs are moving with it," said [Sanjeev Singh Sahni, CEO of Xometry](#). "There's plenty of manufacturing capacity in the U.S. to meet the growing demand for parts from robotics and physical AI to defense, much of it in smaller shops running below full utilization. The challenge is that these products depend on parts made from different suppliers, assembled in stages, and most supply chains weren't built for that many handoffs. Solving that takes access to the right partners at every step. This year's Manufacturing Outlook confirms what we're seeing across our own network: the companies that adapt fastest are the ones treating access, not just assets, as their competitive edge."

Using the insights from Xometry and survey responses from manufacturing executives, four trends were identified that will shape global manufacturing in 2027:

1. **Manufacturing's AI payoff is upstream.** Manufacturers expect AI to have its greatest impact on manufacturability and costing (51%) and quality control (47%), well ahead of production execution on the factory floor (32%). ROI from AI investment is climbing: 57% of manufacturers report significant returns, up from 44% a year ago. But the report also surfaces a gap: much of that reported ROI is coming from general-purpose AI tools that offer no grounding in real pricing, capacity, or production data. The advantage is shifting from simply using AI to accessing AI that's grounded in real manufacturing data. "When it comes to manufacturing, AI adoption has become the baseline, not the milestone. The real question is what gets built on top of it," said [Vaidy Raghavan, Chief Technology Officer of Xometry](#).
2. **America's idle industrial capacity is hiding in small shops.** Smaller manufacturers have significantly more room to run than larger ones: 44% of manufacturers under \$50 million in revenue are operating below 70% capacity, compared with just 16% of manufacturers above \$100 million. Certifications are the gateway to unlocking that capacity for higher-value work. In aerospace and defense, 42% of manufacturers rank compliance as a top obstacle to winning new business.
3. **Supplier optionality is becoming a competitive advantage.** Procurement teams can negotiate price, but they can't control many of the forces driving it: material costs, tariffs, and labor are pushing 94% of manufacturers to raise prices again in 2027, with only about 20% reporting meaningful pushback from buyers this year. That puts more weight on the levers buyers can control, including where they source, how a part is made, which qualified suppliers can take the work, and what alternatives are available when conditions change. "Procurement teams need to rethink how they manage the supply chains. Increasingly the solution is access to a network across multiple regions that you can leverage as you need and when you need it," said [Oscar Lovera, Chief Operations Officer of Xometry](#).
4. **Manufacturing needs skills, not just headcount.** AI and automation operators have become manufacturing's hardest role to fill, ahead of quality engineers, maintenance technicians, and CNC programmers. Higher pay alone isn't solving it: a quarter of manufacturers say raising pay produced no meaningful improvement in hiring or retention, and larger companies are having far more success with it than smaller ones. The gap is pushing manufacturers to rethink which skills they need to build in-house versus access externally—through training partnerships, automation, or outside expertise—when the work demands it.

"The opportunity heading into 2027 is to connect more of America's manufacturing capacity to the companies that need it. The shops that move fastest to make their capacity visible and their credentials current are the ones who win the work," said [Silpa Gollapalli, SVP of Commercial and leader of the Partner Network at Xometry](#).

Download the full [2027 Manufacturing Outlook report](#).

About Xometry

[Xometry's](#) (NASDAQ: XMTR) AI-native marketplace, popular [Thomasnet](#)® industrial sourcing platform, and suite of cloud-based services are rapidly digitizing the manufacturing industry. Xometry provides manufacturers the critical resources they need to grow their businesses and streamlines the procurement process for buyers through real-time pricing and lead time data. Learn more at [xometry.com](#) or follow [Xometry on LinkedIn](#).

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