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Delcam and KUKA launch machining by robot

CADCAM developer Delcam have linked with industrial-robot manufacturer KUKA to develop machining by robot. The companies believe that robots could provide a low-cost alternative to machine tools for many large-scale manufacturing operations carried out on softer materials.

Until now, machining by robot has been limited to a small number of specialist production operations. However, developments undertaken recently in Delcam's PowerMILL machining software and in KUKA's control systems have made it far easier to program robots for a much wider range of applications.

"The cost of installing a robot is far less than the price of a large machine tool with a similar working envelope," claimed Brett Green, General Sales Manager for KUKA. "In addition, the flexibility of our robot means that complex operations can be carried out in a single set-up, so cutting production times and reducing the number of fixtures needed. The ability to effectively programme the robot offline from 3D CAD data offers a significant advantage."



Brett Green of KUKA demonstrates machining by robot

"We anticipate that the main applications will be in pattern-making and in trimming of composite components," added Peter Dickin. "However, the technology can be used in any area where softer materials need to be machined to accuracies of tenths of a millimetre. While this does not match the tolerances possible with a machine tool, it can often be more than adequate for components that might be several metres in length."

"We have collaborated with KUKA to develop easy-to-use routines within our PowerMILL CAM software. These routines can quickly generate programs for its robots that allow smooth machining of large components. Now that this development work has been completed, we will be working together to promote this new approach to large-scale machining operations."

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