

FOCUS

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PUTTING THE BALL IN BALLPOINT PENS

If you write with a ballpoint pen, there is a very good chance that the ball at its tip was made in Luxembourg, where hard materials manufacturer Ceratizit turns out 12 billion such balls every year. This represents 40 to 45% of the global production. CEO Jacques Lanners explains that the firm got into this business in 1962, after one of its engineers found a ball-pressing machine hidden behind a curtain while visiting a factory. The machine produced balls for French pen-maker BIC, which eventually asked Mr Lanner's father to make them from tungsten carbide. Cheaper steel balls wear out, leaking ink. The ball-making also led Ceratizit to set up its first US plant in 1979 after a trade dispute over the balls. The company is among the world's leading independent producers of wear parts for working wood, stone and metal as well as steel mill rolls.



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