

Business Record

IOWA



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH
*Iowa Association of
Business and Industry*

December 2017



working **TOGETHER**

COMPANIES, IOWA SCHOOLS MUTUALLY BENEFIT FROM PARTNERSHIPS

SARA HUNTER, *Outreach Manager, Vermeer Corporation*

S U C C E S S  L I V E S H E R E

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**Iowa Association of
Business and Industry**

Iowa Association of Business and Industry. "The Voice of Iowa Business since 1903" is the largest business network in the state (serving as Iowa's state chamber) with a long legacy of advocating for a competitive business climate in Iowa. ABI offers its nearly 1,500 member companies and their employees opportunities to network, learn best practices in lean processes, workforce, workers' compensation, controlling health care costs, employee drug testing, environmental issues and leadership. ABI works "to foster a favorable business, economic, governmental and social climate within the State of Iowa so that our citizens have the opportunity to enjoy the highest possible quality of life."

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A VIEW FROM THE TOP



David Zrostlik

ABI Chair

Stellar Industries, Garner

Partnerships Between Businesses,
Higher Ed are Powerful

This month's edition of Business Record Iowa focuses on the terrific partnerships that exist in this state between business and our institutions of higher education. Iowa's community colleges and public and private colleges and universities do great work for our state. Here in north-central Iowa, NIACC has been a great resource for Stellar Industries. On a state-wide basis, my company has a long-standing relationship with CIRAS at ISU, which has been an invaluable resource for many years. Let us know about the college partnerships in which your business participates.

In the meantime, as we prepare for the upcoming session of the Iowa General Assembly, now is a good time of the year to get your elected officials into your plant or office. Show them what you do and explain the impact of their decisions on your business.

Next, be sure to attend the 2018 ABI Legislative Reception. This annual meeting is one of ABI's most popular events. I'm not aware of any organization, local or statewide,

that draws more legislators of both parties than does the ABI event. Your local legislators will enjoy this opportunity to visit with you and your fellow Iowa business leaders in a relaxed and informal setting.

As always, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds and Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg, all 150 legislators, and state officials and agency directors have been invited to join you at the reception. The ABI Legislative Reception will be held next month, Jan. 10, in Des Moines. Please make plans to participate in this ABI-sponsored event to kick off the 2018 Iowa legislative year. Find more information at www.iowaabi.org.

Speaking of events, remember to mark your calendars now for ABI's biggest annual event, the annual conference. The 2018 ABI Taking Care of Business Conference will be terrific, and you don't want to miss it. I look forward to seeing you in Greater Iowa City June 5-7 of next year.

Hildahl Joins ABI as Communications Coordinator



David Hildahl has joined the Iowa Association of Business and Industry (ABI) as its communications coordinator. He will plan, coordinate and manage ABI's marketing, public relations and strategic communications efforts.

He has 20 years of copywriting and digital marketing experience at a tech company and two ad agencies.

"David is an award-winning communications and marketing professional, with a strong background in print, copywriting and digital media," said Mike Ralston, president of ABI. "In his career, he has handled virtually every part of a professional communications operation, and I believe he will take ABI's communications and marketing efforts to a new level."

ABI members may submit company news for ABI's weekly Voice of Iowa Business e-newsletter and guest posts for its blog to Hildahl at dhildahl@iowaabi.org.

He has served on the boards of the American Advertising Federation-Cedar Valley, Girl Scouts of Conestoga Council and Waterloo Schools Foundation. Hildahl was a two-term board president of the Waterloo Community Playhouse/Black Hawk Children's Theatre. He joined the Reach Out and Read Iowa board in September.

Hildahl grew up in Gladbrook, Iowa, and graduated from the University of Northern Iowa.





◀ EVENT REWIND

Leadership Iowa



Leadership Iowa Session II

The Leadership Iowa group reconvened November 2-3 in Greene County and Jefferson, Iowa, for their second session of the year. The class spent two days on the important topics of economic development and manufacturing in our state. Participants had the opportunity to tour several unique local manufacturing facilities including John Deere Paton, Scranton Mfg., Power Lift and American Athletic, Inc. The theme of economic development was covered through discussions with experts on a variety of related topics such as community partnerships and resources, creative placemaking and more.

Leadership Iowa Session I

The Leadership Iowa 2017-18 year kicked off in early October in the town of Winterset, Iowa, where 40 new participants met to start their year-long journey together. The session included group communication exercises, dynamic speakers, team-building activities at Wildwood Hills Ranch and an "Amazing Race" to explore Winterset and Madison County.



LEADERSHIP IOWA UNIVERSITY PARTNERS WITH COMPANIES TO KEEP **TOP TALENT**



Jessi Steward

Marketing and Programs
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Millennials. Generation Z. The two heavy-hitting generations that seem to leave many employers seeking change or scratching their heads. While millennials have already infiltrated the workforce, the fast-paced Generation Z is not far to follow. While both groups might be slightly tardy to their seat (if you read into the stereotypes), they certainly bring a lot to the table, and they're eager to do so.

At a time when internships and work-based learning are not only encouraged but required of today's Gen Z college students, and when such opportunities are now becoming prevalent in early high school years, how do companies provide quality work-based learning opportunities for these forward-thinking college graduates? How do we also make sure this talent stays in Iowa after graduation?

The ABI Foundation has been asking these same questions for years and is teaming up with Iowa companies to help offer a solution with Leadership Iowa University (LIU). The program partners with a variety of companies each year to provide a capstone experience for college interns. The students learn their on-the-job knowledge during their internship, then end their summer building on their professional skills and exploring what else Iowa has to offer as LIU participants.

Farm Bureau Financial Services in West Des Moines sent one of its summer interns to the weeklong program for the first time this year.

"We have a strong internship program and felt that Leadership Iowa University would be a great addition

to the overall experience. We wanted to not only reward the great work they did for us this year, but also show our interns that we're a company who is willing to invest in their future and their growth as young professionals," said Sara Deich, human resources program coordinator at Farm Bureau Financial Services.

"After her week, our intern who participated expressed her gratitude for the opportunity. She said that she had a great time meeting new people, and the program really opened her eyes to her future in Iowa. We hope to continue to offer this opportunity to our interns in the future," said Deitch.

The program also gives students a firsthand look at some of the top industries that make Iowa stand out among other states. Local companies and representatives open their doors and donate their time to show these students what they have to offer, providing a great example of what they can find in Iowa.

For example, the LIU students have the opportunity to visit Nationwide Insurance in Des Moines and sit down with some of its leaders to gain insight into the working world.

"Nationwide gets a chance to showcase what makes us such a great place to work. We work with our Associate Resource Groups and leaders to give the students a full idea of what being a Nationwider truly feels like," said Ida Wood, a business development senior consultant at Nationwide who assists with coordinating the visit.

"It's important for college students to have opportunities to understand the culture and feel of a

company, and also to learn internal processes, network and fully understand what a day in the position and industry looks like. Work-based opportunities for college students are crucial for any industry. We have to keep the best and the brightest in the great state of Iowa," said Wood.

Musco Lighting in Oskaloosa is also a longtime partner of Leadership Iowa University and often hosts the group at its facility. For Musco, the benefits of being involved are twofold.

"We love the opportunity to show students the career opportunities available in small-town Iowa. Many students don't realize that there are global opportunities right in their backyard at companies like Musco," said Shelly Herr, HR director at Musco Lighting. "This is also a great chance to meet the cream of the crop students who get involved in this type of program. They're delivered right to our door, and we've even seen some turn into Musco interns and employees."

Other companies that have supported interns through the program include top sponsor Grinnell Mutual Reinsurance Co., as well as Miles Capital, Agri-Industrial Plastics and more. This list of companies that want to find a unique way to invest in their future employees continues to grow each year.

To learn how your company can be represented at Leadership Iowa University and how you can provide this opportunity to your interns, contact us at info@leadershiowauniversity.com.



We love the opportunity to show students the career opportunities available in **small-town Iowa**. Many students don't realize that there are **global opportunities** right in their backyard."

SHELLY HERR, HR director at Musco Lighting



EXPERT ADVICE

CAPITOL BUSINESS

KEEPING RECRUITMENT REAL IN THE TECHNOLOGY AGE

No matter your industry, it's easy to get caught up in using the latest tech trends to stay visible and connect with potential new hires. So when it comes to recruiting and retaining talent, my team follows one simple rule: Keep it real. We consistently push our recruitment efforts beyond trendy online tools to demonstrate the value we find in establishing real connections.

REAL INTERACTION

Beyond traditional career fairs, there are many ways to meet potential candidates face-to-face. Establishing relationships with colleges and universities, like we have at EMC Insurance Companies, is one place to start. We recently partnered with Iowa State University on a case competition allowing student teams to present innovative solutions to a real-world problem. The winners had a chance to interview for internships in our Strategic Analytics Department.

Competitions like this allow candidates to showcase their talent, presenting skills and ability to work in a group setting. Plus, it helps recruit promising young professionals for internships and full-time positions. As the generational shift in the workforce continues, getting young professionals through the door becomes more and more important.

REAL REWARDS

At EMC, we've found that a compelling rewards package is one that moves beyond the basics. Comprehensive medical, vision and dental insurance are standard to today's professionals. What makes EMC stand out as a potential employer are less-common perks such as a pension plan, volunteer time off, flexible work arrangements

and an on-site wellness center. Team members should feel supported in the workplace, so they're motivated to do their best work.

When team members have a positive affinity for their employers, they become one of the most valuable recruiting resources. Word of mouth works wonders to spark interest in your organization. Incentives for bringing in new talent also help. EMC's recognition program, Casting Call, gives current team members an opportunity to refer talented individuals for employment and rewards them if those individuals are hired.

REAL FOCUS ON THE FUTURE

For many professionals, feeling stagnant in a role can be enough to consider a change of employer. Millennials in particular note development as an important part of a job. Investing in your team members' professional development with training and education demonstrates an interest in growing their skills, as well as their value.

EMC team members have a number of opportunities to expand their expertise. LearningCentral, our online training and education system, makes it easy for team members to complete courses, watch instructional videos, register for classes and track their learning history.

High-caliber, talented team members are crucial to positioning your organization for the future. While there is no single solution to recruiting and retaining team members, it helps to cut through the tech trend noise and focus on what's real. Offer real advantages to joining your organization, and the right candidates will follow.

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ABI IS READY FOR 2018



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In less than a month, the 150 members of the Iowa Legislature will convene in Des Moines. Jan. 8, 2018, is the start of the scheduled 100-day second session of the 87th General Assembly. Each year, this column focuses on ABI member companies' goals for the legislative session.

A member-driven organization, ABI's 2018 legislative priority reflects the goals and challenges of business and community leaders in Iowa's 99 counties. As the organization that represents more than 330,000 working Iowans, it's fitting that ABI members have continually prioritized workforce as the number one issue for Iowa businesses. For Iowa to be competitive and increase the number of skilled workers, we support the following:

- Focus on public-private partnerships such as Elevate Advanced Manufacturing and Home Base Iowa.
- Collaborate with Future Ready Iowa on recommendations that focus on upskilling Iowa's workforce.
- Encourage a competitive tax climate that will provide businesses with opportunities to invest and allow employees to keep more of their own money in their pockets.
- Streamline and modernize Iowa's laws and regulations, which will give small businesses the ability to grow and operate in a competitive, global marketplace.
- Advance legislation that protects and improves the quality of our state's natural resources, while supporting business and industry growth and improving the quality of life for all Iowans.

We hope you will join us in 2018 and take time to engage and invite your local legislators into your office. Help them understand what your company does and allow them to meet those who make us successful — our qualified, dedicated team members. The first opportunity to engage with policymakers is at the annual ABI Legislative Reception, which takes place on Jan. 10. It's not too late to register!





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cultivationcorridor.org





SUBMITTED PHOTO

working TOGETHER

COMPANIES, IOWA SCHOOLS MUTUALLY BENEFIT FROM PARTNERSHIPS

PICTURED HERE: *Dr. Michael R. Crum, Vice President for Economic Development and Business Engagement at ISU
and Sara Hunter, Outreach Manager, Vermeer Corporation*



Vermeer Corporation knew there was potential for a unique relationship with Iowa State University when the company opened a location at the university's research park.

The industrial and agricultural equipment manufacturer wanted to leverage the technology and resources available at the university while recruiting and retaining the brightest students for its company, headquartered in Pella.

"Students are in high demand, and trying to capture the best and brightest for internships and long term as full-time employees is important," said Sara Hunter, who oversees Vermeer's day-to-day partnership with Iowa State.

PARTNERSHIP LEADS TO PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT, STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Iowa State and its students benefit just as much from the partnership.

"They gain real-world experience with challenging, long-term projects that provide valuable customer solutions," Hunter said.

A capstone team of senior students designed the structure and components of a horizontal directional drill simulator. Vermeer engineers thought the idea was promising and allowed professors and graduate students to create the software to operate the program.

The simulator is now used in various ways. It gives sixth- and ninth-grade students an opportunity to learn about aspects of advanced manufacturing and receive hands-on experience during the company's annual Manufacturing Day event, said Teri Vos, Vermeer's community relations manager, who works with student engagement for the company.

It also gives Vermeer a chance to train and certify operators on using drilling equipment, and to demonstrate to customers and the public how horizontal drilling works and has less affect on streets and the environment, Hunter said.

"Before people take jobs in drilling, they don't know what they don't know," Vos said. "To have the simulator demonstrates a career path. It wouldn't exist without the ISU partnership."

The ISU-Vermeer partnership also provides the company flexible office space for its full-time employees to work and for students who are working on projects for Vermeer. The connection with ISU also exposes more students to the Vermeer brand and shows the employment options beyond engineering or working on the manufacturing floor, Hunter said.

Twenty ISU students also are participating in the Vermeer International Leadership Program, where they receive a \$2,000 scholarship, a site visit to a Vermeer international location and an opportunity to take leadership classes for a year.

"From day one, the Iowa State partnership with Vermeer has really showcased what is possible when a globally recognized leader like Vermeer partners with Iowa State," said Dr. Michael R. Crum, vice president for economic development and business engagement at ISU. "Vermeer is focused on growing their workforce and developing leaders, building smarter machines, and they have also been an instrumental partner in our ISU Startup Factory effort to commercialize the latest in technology and create companies. Our relationship with Vermeer is truly a showcase of what our economic development efforts are about."

UNIVERSITY ACCEPTS FINANCIAL RISK FOR STARTUPS

University of Iowa professor Michael Henry and associate professor Sarah Vigmostad thought they had developed technology within Henry's Iowa laboratory that was worth pursuing. University officials agreed, and a mentor worked with the duo to apply for patents for the ideas to own the intellectual property basis for their idea to create a device that enables rapid separation of benign and malignant cells to improve cancer diagnostic and research applications.

They formed SynderBio in January 2016, located at the university's Translational Research Incubator. This facility, located on campus, gives startup companies additional space to conduct work while being close to professors' offices and laboratories.

Jordan Kauffman, director of startups in the office of research and economic development, mentored the two and guided them through creating a business plan to develop the company, as well as apply for two Small Business Innovation Research grants that helped get the company going and testing Henry and Vigmostad's ideas.

"If we would have had to figure that out ourselves, we would have wasted so much time and made mistakes," Henry said.

Paying a reasonable lease amount for laboratory space also has helped the company expand and hire its first employee.

"It would have been really expensive for us to start our own laboratory space at the stage the company is now," Henry said.

“STUDENTS ARE IN HIGH DEMAND, AND TRYING TO CAPTURE THE BEST AND BRIGHTEST FOR INTERNSHIPS AND LONG TERM AS FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES IS IMPORTANT.”

SARA HUNTER, *Outreach Manager, Vermeer Corporation*



The university also has taken on some of the early financial risk for the startup, helping it get through the “valley of death,” as Henry described it, so Syn-derBio can get grants and begin research to draw the interest of other companies that will begin to invest in the company and its idea.

UI benefits because it owns the intellectual property and has a royalty stake in the company as it begins to generate revenue, he said.

“The university definitely is interested in having the company be successful and is helping us out in this early stage,” said Henry, who is also the deputy director of research for the Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center.

“When we did this originally, we weren’t intending to develop some technology that might change the world, but it emerged,” he continued. “Without this support, we wouldn’t have been able to get this off of the ground.”

Viewpoint Molecular Targeting has a similar relationship with UI. It’s located in the BioVentures Center at the research park in Coralville. Mike Schultz, an associate professor of radiology at UI, developed the idea for the company and co-founded it.

Schultz took his idea of a new therapy to treat the lethal skin cancer metastatic melanoma to the university’s research foundation, which helped him apply for patents and ownership of the intellectual property. His idea was investible enough that he received space in the research park. The space has given Schultz economically feasible laboratory space to conduct research and perform testing.

“That’s critical,” he said. “You have to have some space to do lab operations outside of the main campus. Because of the conflict of interest, you can’t mix company activities and space at the university.”

The partnership has given Viewpoint a physical building, which the company would not have been able to afford on its own, as well as guidance in applying for SBIR grants to conduct the research and

development in order to persuade the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to conduct clinical trials.

Developing a partnership with the university requires give and take from both parties, Schultz said.

“They are trying to get the best position they can and at the same time trying to protect itself from a deal that might make it less likely that an external pharmaceutical company might acquire us,” he said.

COMPANIES COME TO UNIVERSITY FOR EXPERTISE, PROBLEM-SOLVING

The University of Northern Iowa’s metal casting and additive manufacturing centers have since 1989 helped dozens of Iowa companies and foundries, as well as companies throughout the United States and North America, create products and problem-shoot issues.

Last year, more than 750 visitors came to the additive manufacturing facility alone, and the centers receive telephone calls, emails and personal requests daily for assistance. Metal castings are used in about 97 percent of the durable goods produced in the United States, according to UNI. The centers have projects that range from the simplest castings for five-person companies to work with the U.S. military on submarines.

“We have a great deal of resources and experience in the metal casting industry that we can bring to the companies that they will not have as far as testing equipment and experience in characterizing industrial materials,” said Jerry Thiel, the director of UNI’s metal casting and additive manufacturing centers. “This is a very unique facility and organization, where we have the ability to provide services and experience and consultation really not available at any other university.”

Currently, the metal casting center is working with Sivyer Steel Corp. in Betten-

dorf to run tests and experiments to solve an issue that is slowing production and costing the company money, he said.

At any given time, the centers are conducting projects for about 25 companies, as well as the federal government. The centers help companies that cannot afford the resources UNI has with their smaller budgets. Between 5 percent and 10 percent of the centers’ work is community service for municipalities such as the cities of Waterloo and Cedar Falls.

“That’s where centers like ours can really benefit the industry by housing those resources and maintaining those resources and really understanding their operation,” Thiel said. “Research and development isn’t something a normal small business can achieve. They don’t have the resources or the experience.”

Companies pay for the centers’ services depending upon the scope and extent of the research involved. Smaller projects are completed for free. The centers benefit from the experience their students receive, as well as the profit they make to continue operations.

“Our students get to practice what they learn in the classroom at a higher level than any type of classroom training could teach them,” Thiel said.

One of those projects is to design a part for a V-8 engine for a tractor that will be reproduced in larger quantities in a manufacturing plant. Students receive experience in reverse engineering, cast drafting and process simulation, all of which helps the company succeed in producing the item it needs.

The additive manufacturing center also helps produce parts, as well as determining the properties that work best for a particular molding material for different Iowa companies. This gives students the experience in researching how standard materials used for molding products compare with new additives, Thiel said.

This helps the company “come up with ways they can improve upon what they’re doing and the parts they’re producing,” he said.

“OUR STUDENTS GET TO PRACTICE WHAT THEY LEARN IN THE CLASSROOM AT A HIGHER LEVEL THAN ANY TYPE OF CLASSROOM TRAINING COULD TEACH THEM.”

JERRY THIEL, *director, UNI metal casting and additive manufacturing centers*

CALENDAR OF EVENTS



MARCH 1

Connecting Statewide Leaders

Fairfield

MARCH 13

Iowa Business Day on the Hill

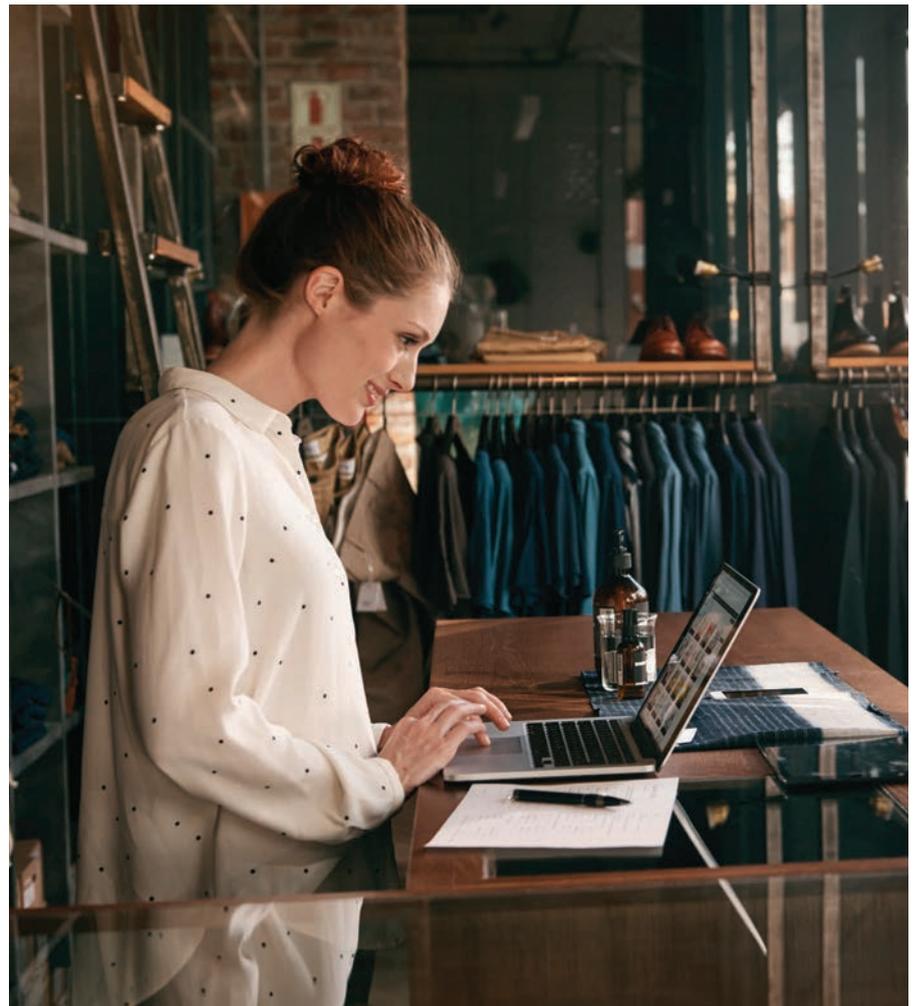
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MANUFACTURING DAY MAKES BIG IMPACT



Alexandra Monaghan

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Elevate Advanced Manufacturing is a statewide initiative with the goal of changing the perception of manufacturing by educating Iowa students and parents about advanced manufacturing careers.

Throughout the year, Elevate Advanced Manufacturing hosts events and activities to help fill the skills gap in manufacturing careers. Every year the first Friday in October is extra special because it's Manufacturing Day. MFG Day celebrates manufacturing and inspires the next generation of manufacturers.

In October, Elevate partnered with CIRAS, Iowa Workforce Development, Iowa community colleges, manufacturers and organizations to plan tours and presentations for students, parents and the public. "Participating in Manufacturing Day was very eye-opening, and all of the manufacturers were very glad they opened their doors," commented Tanya Michener, economic developer, Newton Development Corp. "The manufacturers looked at some things internally that they hadn't done in a while."

Over 2,000 social media viewers participated in Elevate's "Made in Iowa Monday" Facebook post. Elevate followers recognized and responded to featured Iowa products by commenting with the name of the manufacturer and the location of the company producing the pictured product.

Michele Wilson is an educator at McKinley Middle School and shared the school's MFG Day success. "What an amazing day for our students," she said. "Our kids couldn't stop talking about their favorite parts of the day — the engaging tour guides, the fun facts they learned, witnessing the use of unusual technologies, the chance to learn about businesses they didn't know existed, stretching the classroom outside our traditional four walls, the large equipment. I cannot thank you and your organizations enough. Teachers, parents and kids all had a great day."

The Iowa Association of Business and Industry and Elevate Advanced Manufacturing reached nearly 5,000 people during October. Over 100 events were held. Below is a short list of highlighted events:

- The "Made in Iowa Monday" Facebook post reached 2,143 people.
- The McKinley Middle School sixth-grade class presentation and tours included 170 students and 20 educators.
- The Legends in Manufacturing Dinner and Advanced Manufacturing Conference reached 361 adults.
- Newton Economic Development tours reached 116 students.

All of Iowa is encouraged to participate in MFG Day 2018 by visiting www.mfgday.com to learn more about Manufacturing Day events. If you're interested in participating in tours and presentations, visit www.elevateiowa.com.



TOP TIPS

Keys to a Successful Joint Venture Arrangement



Drew D. Larson
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Joint ventures are often an attractive way to develop and commercialize new technologies by taking advantage of multiple parties' skills and resources. However, any time that multiple parties work together there is a real risk of conflict at some point. Much of this conflict can be avoided by doing some upfront work to clearly set and communicate expectations. Here are some tips for anyone considering a joint venture:

1. Think hard about how decisions will be made. This may seem obvious, but many times joint venturers don't have a clear idea how decisions are going to be made. Generally, all parties expect a say in big decisions but never discuss what constitutes a big decision. The parties should think upfront about who will make the big decisions and what constitutes a big decision. These generally include things like hiring key employees, developing new products/services, borrowing money, entering into large or long-term contracts, bringing in new partners or terminating the joint venture.

2. Determine intellectual property ownership. Many joint ventures are set up to commercialize a new technology. Sometimes the technology is independent and the parties contribute the key intellectual property to the joint venture. More often, there is some joint technology to be developed that relies on existing intellectual property independently owned by each joint venturer. When setting up the joint venture, the parties should determine how existing intellectual property will be licensed to the joint venture, the scope of technology to be owned by the joint venture and, most importantly, who will own derivative works.

3. Decide who will fund the joint venture. Successfully developing and commercializing a new technology is expensive and risky. While the parties usually agree on how to fund the initial development plan, the joint venture will often have to pivot or require additional resources to meet all of its goals. The parties will want to discuss upfront how additional funds will be acquired. There

are multiple options, including each party contributing their proportionate share, one party loaning funds to the joint venture or agreeing to raise independent outside capital.

4. Preparing for the breakup. I would love to say that all of these arrangements work out in the long term, but that just isn't the case. The worst-case scenario is where the parties just dislike each other and can't work together going forward. But other things can drive the parties apart, including a party getting acquired, selling the relevant division or having financial troubles. Every joint venture should have a mechanism to terminate the joint venture and clearly describe what will happen to the existing assets, the intellectual property and existing product/service lines upon termination.

Bottom line, joint ventures can create a lot of value and benefits for everyone involved, but they do require a significant investment of thought, effort and resources upfront to make sure they work well.



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EYE ON INDUSTRY

Pilot website seeks to lower Iowa companies' shipping costs



John Wahlert

Logistics Supply Chain Manager

Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations LLC

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If your industry is like mine, you're constantly looking for inefficiencies to eliminate so you can maximize productivity and improve profitability. And if your business ships goods internationally as does my employer — Bridgestone Americas — then you may have noticed an inefficiency when you schedule a shipment:

The trucker brings in an empty container, and you fill it and ship it back to the port. Meanwhile, other companies are importing containers into the state full of goods from around the world — and then hauling them back empty.

This is a significant, statewide inefficiency — and it makes no sense. Approximately 50,000 containers are coming into the state each year and many of them are leaving empty.

Today I'm asking for your help. There's a new website called Container Locator (www.containerlocator.com) that enables companies to track down these empty containers, contact the ocean carrier and negotiate lower shipping rates by utilizing containers that would otherwise leave the state empty.

The website is currently in the pilot phase. From a technical standpoint, we know it works. The site uses a patent-pending process to purchase U.S. Customs data on shipping containers and quickly publishes the data in a searchable, online database.

Now we need companies like yours to integrate Container Locator into their shipping processes and put the website to the real-world test. Ultimately, companies like ours need to demonstrate a savings to our shipping costs from the use of this site.

Once we can demonstrate savings — and I believe we can — then we can prove the concept of the Container Locator website and make it a permanent tool in Iowa exporters' toolbox.

Can you imagine the efficiency? Even if we could fill just half of the containers currently leaving the state empty, we would dramatically reduce the number of trucks on the interstate, reduce the carbon footprint of the shipping industry, and we would be money ahead to boot.

John Wahlert is the logistics supply chain manager for Bridgestone Americas Tire Operations LLC. He is the chair of the Freight Roundtable of the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), where the idea for the Container Locator was first conceived in 2014. Bridgestone Americas Tire Operation is the U.S. subsidiary of Bridgestone Corp., the world's largest tire and rubber company. BSAM and its subsidiaries develop, manufacture and market a wide range of Bridgestone, Firestone and associate brand tires to address the needs of a broad range of customers, including consumers, automotive and commercial vehicle original equipment manufacturers, and those in the agricultural, forestry and mining industries.

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