



Rebranded Nevada Industry Excellence focuses on growth

John Seelmeyer, 11/30/2009

The university-sponsored extension service that assists Nevada's manufacturers increasingly is focused on helping them grow their revenues.

And that, managers of the service say, translates into a focused, disciplined process of innovation for manufacturers that hope to grow.

Nevada Industry Excellence — it was known as Management Assistance Partnership or MAP until a few days ago — has focused on cost-containment through most of its 15-year history of working with manufacturers in Nevada, says Sandy Haslem, its director.

That work has included workshops on lean manufacturing — eliminating extra steps and extra costs — as well as energy-efficiency in manufacturing processes and building operation.

But after working with about 350 businesses statewide, Nevada Industry Excellence found in a survey that more than half of its potential clients are focused these days on the need to grow revenue.

And the best way to grow revenue, program managers for Nevada Industry Excellence say, is through development of innovative products and services that command premium prices.

"If you're not meaningfully unique, you'd better be cheap," says Bob Bricca, a one-time manufacturing executive who now works as a program manager for Nevada Industry Excellence.

The innovation program taught by Nevada Industry Excellence these days has its roots in a program developed by innovation researcher Doug Hall, author of "Jump Start Your Business Brain."

Hall teaches that innovations by manufacturers — and other businesses, for that matter — need to provide an obvious and overt benefit to customers, need to be accompanied by a believable sales message and need to be dramatically different from the competition.

And the process of innovation, Bricca says, demands a disciplined and methodical approach if it's going to succeed.

That's a challenge for many smaller manufacturers in northern Nevada, says David Steiger, a program manager with Nevada Industry Excellence. The leaders of many of those companies are so busy with day-to-day demands — especially as staff sizes have shrunk — that they're unwilling to break away for even a half-day session on innovation.

Bricca said, however, some companies have come away from Nevada Industry Excellence seminars with as many as 50 ideas for innovative products. The program managers then are available to help winnow the list and keep their development on track over several months.

If nothing else, Steiger says, a break from the day-to-day pressures of a business can provide renewed perspective.

"If gives you a chance to see your product through the customers' eyes, and it gives you a chance to see what else you can do with your company's competencies," he says.

The growth-related program of Nevada Industry Excellence also includes assistance in developing export programs, assistance with development of Web sites and other sales-oriented counseling.

Along its new focus on growth strategies, Haslem says the rebranded Nevada Industry Excellence will maintain the programs that long have been at its core. That includes lean systems, quality programs (including ISO certification and Six Sigma programs) and energy conservation.

She says the organization decided to change its name after research found that potential clients didn't know about Management Assistance Partnership and couldn't puzzle out an answer from the old name.

While the organization conducts numerous training sessions, both in classrooms and on shop floors, Haslem says often works closely with company managements over a longer term.

“Our clients look to us as strategic partners,” she says. Nevada Industry Excellence is the industrial extension service of the Nevada System of Higher Education, and works much like the agricultural extension agents who have helped improve farm and ranch operations across the United States. Much of its funding comes from the U.S. Department of Commerce.

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