R&D is a Company's Life Blood

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When DSM Desotech's Jim Reitz was appointed the new business director of UVention, a group dedicated to specialty UV/EB curable coating solutions, he left a void at his former post — business director of DSM Somos, a global materials supplier that provides the stereolithography resins used in 3D models and prototypes.

Michelle Brand, previously with Ticona, stepped in to fill the role and assumed direction of strategic and administrative business activity (i.e. she oversees all sales, marketing, R&D, product development and technical service).

In the latest *PD&D Fireside Chat*, we had a chance to take some time with Michelle and discuss her new role with a former competitor; how she became accidentally hooked on plastics, a company's life-blood, and how the "almighty drive to keep cost down creates an end-state detrimental to humanity."

PD&D: How did you get your foot in the door at DSM [1]***?***

Michelle Brand: DSM had been a respected competitor of mine for many years. I liked the company and its focus on innovation. A recruiter had been calling me and after ducking several calls, I learned that he had a business director position at DSM where I could lead a team of very talented people and facilitate development of truly remarkable materials to change the way the world uses SL materials.

The funny thing is that the interview team included a vice president with whom I had competed quite strongly with a few years back, and they had called a neighbor of mine who had been a previous employee of theirs.

PD&D: How did you get your start in the industry?

Brand: Completely by accident. I had an opportunity at a great custom compounder of engineering plastics called GLS Plastics to run their marketing department while I got my MBA.

I didn't plan to stay in plastics very long, but my boss showed me that this industry has tremendous opportunities and it isn't about making someone buy your material. It's about understanding what their fundamental needs are and developing materials that provide solutions. I was hooked.

PD&D How do you value R&D within a company?

Brand: It's the crucial life-blood of our company. It allows us to expand the use of SL materials from just prototyping into parts that have real use.

PD&D: Does DSM place a strong emphasis on R&D to push the company forward?

Brand: Yes, it is a huge emphasis, 70 percent of our sales were from products created in the last three years.

Products like WaterShed XC (the industry's best selling resin), Somos NeXt, and NanoTool have all been the result of extensive, dedicated R&D.

DSM is about enabling people to live better and we have been told that the use of our SL materials in developing applications such as water filtration systems and drill guides has even saved lives.

PD&D: What has been your greatest challenge during your time in the materials business?

Brand: Time-to-market has decreased tremendously. Changes occur so rapidly, if you can't commercialize products quickly, you miss opportunities.

That's where stereolithography is so valuable. Stereolithography technologies help developers decrease costs, evaluate more products, and move their products to market faster.

PD&D: What are some of the great myths when it comes to materials and additive manufacturing?

Brand: Probably the biggest myth is that stereolithography materials are all brittle, and can only be used for prototyping. Stereolithography parts created today are now actually being used as real functioning parts, but the perception continues.

PD&D: What is the current state of the chemicals and plastics/materials industry?

Brand: The chemicals and plastics/materials industry is in constant flux. Companies back and forward integrate, creating concern among their customers and suppliers. Mergers, acquisitions, and spin-offs change the scope and focus of many businesses and their buying power.

Increasing regulation and the world's consciousness of our impact on this earth has fueled a "green" movement that has had ramifications back to the chemical components of everything. There seems to be a movement of more transparency to the consumer, which provides opportunities as well as challenges.

At the same time, the industry faces allocations in many areas from the sudden return of demand while still facing potential threats of a second dip or sustained slower growth economy.

PD&D: What is your take on the industry associations and their role in the industry?

Brand: Industry associations provide a way for ideas to have cross fertilization, for players to share developments and best practices. It crucial to the success of anyone and any business — this collaboration delivers measurable results.

PD&D: Given your extensive background with Ticona, what was the most interesting project that you've seen come across your desk?

Brand: One of the most interesting projects was helping Molex proactively create a halogen-free connector family in a very short time-frame.

What was incredible was the collaboration with everyone to assure the same form, fit, and function would be provided.

We formed teams to cover every aspect from concept to development to manufacture, tapping resources, and providing access to competencies that many didn't know existed. It was a resounding success, a lot of fun and made the world just a little bit "greener."

PD&D: As an IL-based company, how would you compare the Midwestern work ethic to the surrounding coasts?

Brand: I see less evidence of this kind of regionalization as we become more global. The increase of mobility has changed the look and feel of plants everywhere and made us a melting pot of ideas, experience, and enthusiasm.

PD&D: Given the current state of the economy, what keeps you up at night?

Brand: What worries me most is that the almighty drive to keep cost down creates an end-state detrimental to humanity.

I truly believe the increase in pollution and (possibly correlating) sky-rocketing

increase in asthma and other respiratory diseases, the finding of toxic substances in our children's toys and other goods, the poisoning of our waters and the devaluing of employees as people — all to meet stockholder expectations.

What reassures me is the position taken by DSM CEO, Feike Sijbesma, who will not allow those sacrifices to be made here. A business that people can trust, and one that enables their customers to grow more rapidly, will not only survive, but will thrive.

For more information, please visit www.dsm.com *[2].*

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