

# Forward Focus

Montana Manufacturing Extension Center

WINTER 2002

## Plant P&L Provides Sure Footing for Red Oxx

*By Deborah Nash*

A Plant P&L, a profit and loss reconciliation spreadsheet, can do very powerful things if you keep it updated and use it often, especially for companies that offer a range of customized products where other costing systems may be too cumbersome. Just ask Red Oxx Manufacturing owners Jim Markel, Jr., and Perry K. Jones.

A simple performance measurement tool, the Plant P&L determines a plant's profitability on a short-term basis. This tool is not to be confused with the traditional accounting P&L statement, as production managers or owners using a Plant P&L can see performance figures long before those month-end statements arrive. Using the output of their recently developed Plant P&L, Red Oxx owners are pro-actively managing their expanding business.

The Billings company makes soft-sided luggage for hunters, travelers



*Perry Jones*



*Jim Markel*

and outdoors people, as well as weight training accessories. Customized "corporate identity" bags include a high quality, embroidered logo for a

company's top-end employees and customers. The plant and factory outlet are on North 13th Street.

Put the owners, former Marine and Navy riggers, in the same room, and you get a lot of ribbing back and forth about who's the better man.

Jones is the creative designer for bags ranging from popular carry-on types to specialty medical equipment sales kits and padded rifle bags. He is a master at customizing for a customer's unique need, like the bags he designed to store helicopter doors during warm weather.

"As people describe what they need, I can just see the design forming in my head. I don't know where it comes from; it's just there," he said. In the Navy, he was responsible for the packing and repair of all items associated with parachutes, ejection seats, climbing, and airdrops. He also crafted specialty need bags for his

*(continued on page six)*

## A Connecticut Yankee Comes to Montana

Dale Detrick is Montana's "Connecticut Yankee." He spends his time convincing manufacturers to implement technological improvements and proven business practices. Much like the character in Mark Twain's book "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" convinced the

Knights of the Roundtable to use bicycles instead of horses, he moves companies toward better ways of doing business today.

Eager to continue helping companies prosper and be nearer to family in the West, this Connecticut Yankee recently joined the



*Dale Detrick,  
Field Engineer*

Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC) as a field engineer serving eastern Montana. He comes from ConnStep, a Manufacturing Extension Partnership affiliate in Connecticut, where he served as a manufacturing consultant for seven years. He also founded and ran DM Engineering, Inc., a successful and technologically diverse contract manufacturing firm for 25 years in

*(continued on page two)*

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## Director's Comment... Opportunity



In chaos, there is opportunity. In the chaotic events of the past year, opportunity was also present. When the stock market tumbled, there were as many buyers as sellers. During the volatile energy price fluctuations in the West, creative solutions were put into motion to weather the surge while feeding interest in fuel cell research and renewed interest in alternative energy.

In the wake of criminal actions that destroyed lives, families and buildings, our nation found opportunity—to care for one another, drop petty differences, build important coalitions, and work to surgically remove a worldwide threat. As the leader of the free world and the bastion of democracy, our choice of action was pivotal. We could have thrown our arms up in despair, huddled each in our own little corner,

and given in to those that would destroy us. But the fact is, it is not in our fabric to do so. It simply wasn't possible.

The manufacturing community, too, has suffered a blow over the past year, but not a fatal blow. From the uncertainty of the downturn, comes the opportunity to look past immediate problems and work to position our strengths while competitors also face uncertainty. I often think of a phrase by Henry Brooks Adams (1838-1918),

"Chaos often breeds life, when order breeds habit." Having been jarred from the cadence of habit, we have the opportunity to rethink strategy and align activities to grow our advantage. Instead of across the board cuts, we can make changes selectively to remain positioned for the upturn. We can and will recover. It's in our fabric to do so. Not only will we quickly recover economically, we will be stronger, more agile, more competitive. If we were formidable in the past, we will be awe-inspiring in the future.

The best in the New Year ahead.

**Steve Holland**  
MMEC Director

*Yankee...*

*(continued from page one)*

Brookfield, Conn., designing and manufacturing equipment for companies like Ford Motor Co., Kodak, and Monsanto.

Loaded with real-world experience and a Master's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Yale University, Detrick will help manufacturers overcome technical production problems, improve processes and encourage effective employee performance. Since both he and Twain's Connecticut Yankee agree, "Old habit of mind is one of the toughest things to get away from in the

world," he will work to give manufacturers a fresh set of eyes both on the shop floor and in management using the high quality, unbiased advice and assistance offered throughout the state by MMEC.

Detrick replaces Keith Novakovich, a six-year veteran of MMEC, who is now Chief Operations Officer for Anderson Steel in Billings. Detrick can be reached at the MMEC office in the Big Sky Economic Development Center, downtown Billings, phone 406-256-6871. MMEC field engineers in other areas of Montana can be reached by calling 800-MEP-4MFG or 406-994-3812 at Montana State University in Bozeman.



Mark your calendar for the 2002 Compete Smart statewide manufacturing conference which will be held in Missoula this fall on Oct. 3 & 4. The conference is designed to provide you and your key people with the best tools and knowledge available to successfully compete with companies here and throughout the world. This is your chance to

- Network with other manufacturers
- Hear what other companies do
- Choose tools that work for you
- Get energized for tomorrow

Be watching future issues of Forward Focus and the mail for more details about this important conference featuring vendors who play an important role in manufacturing, an energizing keynote speaker and workshops. Interested vendors should call MMEC at 800-MEP-4MFG or 406-994-3812.

# Center Expands Training Opportunities

Training opportunities through the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center will soon be expanded for Montana employees, company owners and managers. Kate Bryan, training development engineer, recently joined the MMEC field staff to increase the center's current course offerings in lean manufacturing techniques, understanding and application of quality systems, internal quality auditing, product costing, and other managerial and technical training.

New course offerings directed at improving workforce skills will also be developed and delivered as a result of a training grant of \$115,000 awarded to the center from the Montana Department of Commerce. These funds are part of a larger Commerce workforce training program through Montana Department of Labor and Industry funds under the Governors' Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

MMEC Director Steve Holland commented that WIA funds will make training more affordable and help more Montana workers and companies compete. "A unique feature within MMEC is follow up services

available from field staff to help people implement what they learn. Our field staff is out there and has a pulse on workforce needs that fit Montana companies. Courses will be added as needs are identified."



Kate Bryan

Montana  
Workforce Training  
Funds  
Montana Dept. of Commerce  
Montana Dept. of Labor

"From our perspective, it made sense to use a portion of the WIA funds to support and augment the training programs already available to Montana manufacturers through the established MMEC network," said Mark Simonich, Director, Montana Department of Commerce. "Our common objective is to

enhance the training resources currently available for workforce development."

Kate will be a great asset to our manufacturers, according to Holland. She has an understanding of manufacturing, people and marketing. She has a B.S. in Industrial and Mechanical Engineering from Montana State University and an M.S. in Mass Communications from the University of Minnesota. She has worked as a business consultant and marketing professional for 15 years, serving a variety of companies ranging from value-added manufacturers to high tech software. Her business background includes time with Andersen Consulting, The Pillsbury Company, Palmquist Creative and most recently RightNow Technologies. She can be reached at the MMEC

home office in the MSU College of Engineering, 406-994-3812.

Commerce will use the balance of the Labor and Industry WIA funds to provide grants to new and expanding companies that compensate their employees at least \$11.35 per hour as salary or salary plus benefits.

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## Best Wishes to Linda Reed

Linda Reed is leaving the MMEC Advisory Board after assuming new duties as executive director of the Montana Community Foundation, succeeding MCF Executive Director Sidney Armstrong who retired at the end of 2001.

Linda served on the MMEC board from its inception six years ago, first

from Governor Marc Racicot's office as Economic Development Advisor and then as a telecommunications representative while at Qwest. An active community leader, she chairs the Montana Rural Development Partnership and is a member of the Montana Economic Developers Association and two local develop-

ment associations. She also serves on the Montana Arts Council.

We wish Linda the best in her new position with MCF, one of over 600 independent community foundations in the nation and a unique statewide charitable organization whose focus is community vitality and endowed philanthropy.

# Register Yourcompany.biz or someone else will

by Patrick Pitman, guest writer

Yourcompany.com can now become Yourcompany.biz effective October 2001, a change heralded as opening up the Internet for more business. But the Top Level Domain name ".biz" also promises to confuse customers, open up new competitive threats, and expose you to cyber squatters. Take notice and protect your Internet brand and trademarks today.

More than 28 million domain names have been registered using the .com Top Level Domain (TLD) name. Many companies and organizations have called for alternatives to .com aside from .net, .org, and .edu.

The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Number (ICANN) is a non-profit corporation that regulates the domain name system. In response to pressures, ICANN approved the addition of seven TLD's, the first of which is .biz. The .biz registry launched October 1, 2001. If you have a commercial web site, register it as a .biz site, too. If you are planning a new site, register it as both a .com and .biz.

## Why it's important:

- Your customers are less likely to be confused.
- Your brand deserves protection from cyber squatters.
- Manage the changes to TLD's now, or budget for lawyers later.

## What you can do about it:

- Identify which of your presently registered names are worth protecting.

- Prioritize which new TLD names are worth registering first.
- Register names under the new TLD's before someone else does.
- Watch for the roll-out of additional TLD's and take advantage of "sunrise" provisions to secure your name in advance.
- Registering a generic word(s) as your domain name as a .com gives you no protection against someone else registering under .biz.

Why both .com and .biz now? The .com TLD remains the most widely recognized and valuable. The need to register .biz is two-fold:

- 1) prepare in advance for the rise in popularity of .biz and
- 2) protect your Internet brand, intellectual property, and trademarks.

The first reason is simple enough: you want to maximize your exposure to customers now and in the future. Adding the .biz to your domain name makes you that much more easily found as .biz gains in popularity. But what's more critical today is to prevent your customers from being confused. Think Amazon.com hasn't already claimed Amazon.biz? You, too, need to make this defensive maneuver. You should also consider registering your domain name as other TLD's as they emerge. Some more reasons why:

- Cyber squatters register a domain name betting that someone will pay more for it, or pay to get it back. Avoid the hassle and register first.

## MMEC Takes e on the

MSU's Montana Manufacturing Extension Center (MMEC) will soon take three important eCommerce assessment tools on the road to help Montana businesses get further down the road to eBusiness functionality thanks to a grant from the Qwest/Montana Economic Developer's Association (MEDA) 2001 Building Better Economy grant program. The grant funds target ways to help Montana businesses and communities better use existing telecommunications infrastructure to strengthen local economies.

The MMEC award will be used to distribute the interactive eCommerce assessment tools along with an introductory session on how they work either in community workshops or face to face with manufacturers at their plants. The three tools

- Search engines take into account the domain name when considering how highly to rank a site for a given keyword search. Now Yourcompany.biz can also show up as a result—whether or not you own it.

Where to find out more:  
[www.neulevel.com](http://www.neulevel.com)  
[www.netsol.com](http://www.netsol.com)

*About the author: Patrick Pitman is a principal of E-business Coach, Inc., an Internet business development and consulting service to advance your market strategy. [www.e-businesscoach.com](http://www.e-businesscoach.com).*

## THINK

## ABOUT IT:

Take time to learn.



Enroll in a class for a new point of view.



But unless you also schedule in time to incorporate what you've learned, your investment will be wasted.



Jenna Caplette

Personal/professional coach, former business owner & author

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## Vitamin C for Your PC

When you lock your business door at night is your critical electronic data safe? Your accounts payable/receivable, payroll, order information, financials, specifications and design work, etc.? All are

natural and not so natural disasters, as the events of September 11, 2001 illustrate. You cannot afford to leave security to chance.

Here at MMEC, we learned about the impact of the unexpected first hand when a fierce spring storm disturbed a re-roofing project at our home office in Bozeman creating concerns about asbestos contamination. The staff was evacuated from its offices for almost a week. We were lucky. Our electronic files are backed up on a networked drive at a nearby building, and with cooperation from neighboring offices, we were able to reconnect to our files and continue with business. We were in tight quarters but still functioning. At a sister MEP center in New York City, the office manager luckily remembered to grab back up disks as they left their offices, only four blocks from the World Trade Center site, on Sept. 11.

Business security cannot be trusted to luck. Your critical data should be duplicated, backed up

and stored off-site to minimize the impacts of unforeseen events.

Viruses pose a more likely threat for companies that use networked systems, e-mail, or the Internet. There are steps to minimize both threats.

Simple vitamin C for your PC system is to install virus detection software that scans your network server, mail server, desktop, and any firewalls. Virus software is easily updated from the provider Web site on the Internet.

Educate your people. System users need to know how viruses can be introduced accidentally, what the company policy is regarding PC security, and about backing up files in case of a failure or virus. Some systems can be automatically set to back up networked data at designated intervals, but those working with stand-alone hard-drives may need to copy data to a networked drive or back up on zip-disks or other high capacity formats.

Mission-critical data should be backed up and stored off-site to enable resumption of business as quickly as possible should a disaster or virus strike. If that is not being done, your business is at serious risk.

## Commerce Help e Road

address eCommerce Opportunities, Readiness, and Security. The first two are designed to help business owners and managers strategize and determine what is currently in place within the company and what is needed to conduct various levels of eCommerce. The third helps project managers navigate the twists and turns of safety and reliability issues in the virtual world.

These tools are designed to help businesses make the adjustment to the rapid changes faced in the new digital economy. The assessment kits were developed through the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Manufacturing Extension Partnership Network. Call MMEC for more information at 800-MEP-4MFG or 406-994-3812.

important, maybe even critical, to your business. And they are vulnerable to viruses, mechanical failures,

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## Meeting Neighbors

The Montana Manufacturing Extension Center Advisory Board is getting to know its neighbors across Montana. One quarterly meeting each year convenes in a select city where members participate in local activities and tour manufacturing operations to augment business discussions.

This fall, the roving meeting was in Great Falls, Montana's third largest city, population of 56,690, with over 125 manufacturers, and an active

business and development community.

While there, members took advantage of an opportunity to participate in a commercialization conference sponsored by the MSU Great Falls College of Technology, Montana Department of Commerce, the Great Falls Area Chamber of Commerce, High Plains Development, MMEC, and the University of Great Falls.

At the end of the day, they headed downtown to the third annual

Downtown University, where merchants put on mini-seminars about their products and services, from "Let's Talk Tea" to "Retirement Planning."

Before departing, board members toured NorthWinds Publishing and Printing, a commercial printing plant specializing in directory printing, booklet printing and bindery and distribution service where they learned how technology is changing the printing world and competitive challenges.

*Red Oxx*  
(continued from page one)

crews. These skills carried over to Red Oxx, where specialty, customized items are often requested and delivered.

Markel is self-described as the promotional “idea guy who loves making the deal.” He handles the administrative and marketing side of the business. He enjoys staying in touch with customers and working trade shows. He also manages the robust [www.redoxx.com](http://www.redoxx.com) Web site.

Together, running Red Oxx, they are a formidable team, both passionate about their roles in the 15-year-old business which was purchased from Markel’s father, Jim, Sr., in 1994. Now the co-owners are passionate about keeping a growth trend going, and data from the Plant P&L is helping them manage that growth.

MMEC and the University Technical Assistance Program (UTAP) teamed up to help Red Oxx develop the Plant P&L a few months ago. Built in a spreadsheet, it contains the company’s average operating and employment costs and is compared to a weekly production log. If the contribution margin (sale price minus the cost of materials) of the items made on the production log exceeds the operating and employment costs, the company operated profitably during the week. The information is kept in a historical log and can give a business health snapshot at regular intervals. From it, sound decisions can be made. Red Oxx uses it weekly to plan ahead. “It could be used daily,” Markel said, “as it is much more detailed than a

bottom end accounting report, where information can come too late.”

The Plant P&L sets the bar on what needs to happen to remain profitable. Variables can be plugged in to explore the impacts of a decision. With Red Oxx planning a move soon to a larger, nearby facility, this is a very important tool.

“As a measuring stick, the Plant P&L has made us work harder and faster,” Markel reported. Seeing where sales vs. production were on a chart those first few weeks provided a visual marker that sparked production to new heights, not unlike

issues. “The danger of using a Plant P&L is a perception of profit in the reports if what is built just sits on the shelf. If it’s just on the shelf and isn’t going to turn into cash, you’ve lost money.

“The Plant P&L helps Markel and Jones match production capacity with customer demand.”

Deibert, and Robin Kerbel, UTAP, were “sticklers for detail,” Markel said of the data exploration needed to build the P&L. They were sticklers about every bag type and all raw materials. “I know every cost for each one now, every clasp, every strap.” All good things to know

when bag sales make up 57% of the company’s business.

“Without accountability for expenditures, you are flying by the seat of your pants. By plugging in current information, we can control our growth. Getting the kind of organizing the center provided is smart for any business,” he said. “I’d recommend it to anyone and everyone.”

Another smart thing Markel said he has done was take himself off the production floor six months ago to focus on

the marketing and continuous improvement side of the business. Taking time for one-on-one marketing with customers is paying off big for a company that prides itself in warm, personal relationships with its customers. The company slogan, “When the need for function surpasses the desire for fashion, it’s time to call Red Oxx,” seems fitting for outdoor gear that is used in remote places like Tibet and Mt. Everest.



*A whole lot of stitching going on at Red Oxx.*

the bar used by a high jumper to gauge what will take him/her over the top.

The production push at Red Oxx surprised even Markel. Output was boosted by 15 percent just by being able to visualize it in relationship to sales.

“Using a Plant P&L works especially well for a company like Red Oxx that builds to customer order,” according to Al Deibert, MMEC, who works with many companies on costing

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## Manufacturing News

The 5th annual **Made in Montana Food and Gift Show** is set for March 21-23 at the Great Falls Civic Center. The show gives small manufacturers and growers in Montana an opportunity to meet buyers, show off their products and attend informational classes. Booth applications are now available from the Montana Department of Commerce and can be downloaded from [www.madein-montanausa.com](http://www.madein-montanausa.com) or by calling Rebecca Bauman, coordinator, at 406-444-4392. All potential vendors must be registered to use the Made In Montana/Grown In Montana logo before registering for the show. Buyers wanting more information can contact Angelyn Stonebraker at the Montana Department of Agriculture, 406-444-2402.

**Quake Industries, Inc.**, a thermo-plastic injection molding company, recently purchased the former Sunrise Medical building at 732 Cruiser Lane in Belgrade, Mont., to provide for increasing production needs. The new building will nearly triple Quake's space to approximately 22,500 sq. ft. and will house administrative and production oper-

ations. Owners Ron and Laura Pierzina said years of support by the Belgrade community made the decision to stay in Belgrade an easy one.

[www.quakeinc.com](http://www.quakeinc.com)

**IndustryWeek** recently examined data from its Fifth Annual Census of Manufacturers that confirm the trend toward adoption of lean-manufacturing practices, according to a National Coalition of Advanced Manufacturing news bulletin. The 2001 Census shows, for example, that 32% of manufacturers use predictive or preventive maintenance, up significantly from 28% in 2000 and 20% in 1999. The survey indicates that 23% of manufacturers are widely using continuous-flow production, up from 21% in 2000 and 18% in 1999, and 19% of manufacturing firms have adopted cellular manufacturing, a slight increase from 17% in 2000. See complete article "Rising to the Challenge" by Peter Strozniak, November 2001 at [www.industryweek.com/CurrentArticles](http://www.industryweek.com/CurrentArticles)

**A&S Tribal Industries**, owned by the Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes on

the Fort Peck Reservation, was awarded a \$50,000 grant from the Foundation for the American Indian in Westport Conn. A&S Chairman Leonard J. Smith said, "This generous contribution helps launch the expansion program underway at our machining and metal fabrication facility."

Following a referral from MMEC, the MSU TechLink Center brokered an agreement between **American Eagle Instruments, Inc.** of Missoula and the NASA Glenn Research Center to evaluate non-stick properties of hand-held dental instruments. Composite resin cavity-filling materials are sticky and can adhere to dental tools, creating problems when the material sticks to the tool and not the tooth. American Eagle is a manufacturer of hand-held dental instruments. Researchers at the NASA Glenn center have developed unique methods for evaluating the tools for their ability to not stick to filling composites. Under the terms of the agreement, American Eagle will supply NASA with different types of dental tools. NASA will provide comparative results to rate the tools for their non-stick properties.

## Business Brief

Over the past six years, the Montana Manufacturing Extension Center has had tremendous success in helping manufacturers across the state to reduce operating costs, increase quality, reduce unnecessary inventory levels and improve efficiency. Integrated improvement initiatives often have the best impacts.

To help companies capitalize on integrating their improvements across all levels, MMEC field engineers Mark Shyne, Paddy Fleming, Todd Daniels, Al Deibert, Kreg Worrest, and Dale Detrick recently

completed an intensive, week-long course at the PBA Performance Institute on Executive Coaching. The Professional Business Advisor training was offered through the NIST/MEP University, part of the national network support for manufacturing assistance centers.

The PBA training enhances MMEC delivery and/or oversight of systems solutions like lean manufacturing enterprise, strategic management, quality management systems, market development, etc., that increase long-term competitiveness. The cen-

ter staff explored more strategic ways to work side by side with companies whose management is ready to embrace larger scale change management. It included company and management vision/goals identification, provided assessment tools to examine a company's current systems against the current market, and explored ways to customize solutions that integrate a company's processes, people and technology into overall business strategies. Call us at (800) MEP-4MFG or (406) 994-3812 to see where PBA-level assistance fits your business.

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## 27th Annual Montana Economic Outlook Seminars

### “Investing in Montana” 2002 Schedule

<b>JANUARY 29</b>	<b>Helena</b> – Best Western Colonial
<b>JANUARY 30</b>	<b>Great Falls</b> – Holiday Inn
<b>FEBRUARY 1</b>	<b>Missoula</b> – Holiday Inn Parkside
<b>FEBRUARY 5</b>	<b>Billings</b> – Radisson Northern Hotel
<b>FEBRUARY 6</b>	<b>Bozeman</b> – Comfort Inn
<b>FEBRUARY 7</b>	<b>Butte</b> – War Bonnet Inn
<b>FEBRUARY 12</b>	<b>Kalispell</b> – WestCoast Kalispell Center Hotel
<b>MARCH 12</b>	<b>Havre</b> – Duck Inn
<b>MARCH 13</b>	<b>Lewistown</b> – Yogo Inn

*Presented by First Interstate Bank & UM Bureau of Business and Economic Research, & co-sponsored by local area Chambers of Commerce*

*Seminar registration fee is \$70 and includes a one-year subscription to Montana Business Quarterly (a \$35 value). Continuing education credits are offered and require an additional \$20 processing fee. Register by calling 406-243-5113 or by visiting [www.bber.umt.edu](http://www.bber.umt.edu)*

Potholes. Volatile energy costs to manufacturers. One-third of Montana's children living in below-poverty-level homes. Each of these represents a important economic barometer of the prospect for long-term economic growth in Montana.

At the 27th annual Montana Economic Outlook Seminar sessions across Montana, you will hear more about these seemingly isolated facts and how shoring up the basic building blocks of our economy—transportation, energy resources, and human capital—is more important than ever.

BBER Director Paul Polzin will address the after-effects of recent national events and the U.S. recession in his national and state outlooks. He will include his characteristic, individual economic forecast for each seminar city. MMEC Director Steve Holland, will be the luncheon speaker addressing the long-term implications of the energy situation for Montana industries. Other speakers during the morning include Kevin McNew, an associate professor of Agricultural Economics & Economics at Montana State University; Norma Nickerson, director of the UM Institute for Tourism & Recreational Research, Charles E. Keegan, III, director of Forest Industry Research at the BBER, and Stephen F. Seninger, BBER.

Each seminar runs from 8 a.m. to 12:50 p.m. (see schedule for dates and places at left)

P A G E 8



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a NIST | Network  
MEP | Affiliate