

Eureka! Winning Ways Comes to Georgia

To help Georgia companies develop new strategies for growth, Georgia Tech's [Enterprise Innovation Institute](#) has begun offering "Eureka! Winning Ways®," an award-winning three-step process that includes idea engineering, success screening and action-plan coaching. The process is offered through the U.S. Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP).

Developed by Doug Hall, former master marketing inventor with Procter & Gamble and former host of the ABC television series *American Inventor*, Eureka helps companies assess how to best jump-start growth through innovative and creative ideas. Projects, which are led by Georgia Tech experts who have been certified in the Eureka Ranch technologies, examine how companies can establish more effective marketing messages, capture new customers or markets, and develop new products, services or business models. Clients have described the Eureka Ranch, Hall's headquarters in Newtown, Ohio, as a safe haven for original thinking.

"Eureka deals with what we call the 'fuzzy front end' of new ideas and products – it's not hardcore product development," explained Don Pital, a Georgia Tech Eureka

expert. "This is often the hardest part for small manufacturers, because they either don't have staff devoted to idea generation and follow through or they lack a systematic process to evaluate ideas."

Before beginning the Eureka process, Pital holds a planning meeting with the interested company to conduct a strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) analysis and to assess the cultural tolerance for innovation and growth. These survey results are then shared with the company during the process to better coach the client and understand their risk tolerance level and potential cultural roadblocks to success.

"Lots of companies are averse to change and have a mentality of 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it,'" he said. "We ask companies where they want to be three years from now and where they are now. The gap between the two is where successful companies grow new ideas and products."



Woodbury Box in Thomaston, Ga., developed a new wire gardening basket as a result of going through the Eureka process with Georgia Tech's assistance.

Photo courtesy of Woodbury Box

The first step in Eureka is idea generation, a disciplined system for thinking smarter and more creatively about old and new ideas for top-line growth. According to Pital, the "mentally stimulating" day is a multi-round process of "structured ideation." Eight to 15 people representing top management within the company work together to develop 50 or more measurably smarter choices for growth. The group refines and rewrites the top 12 ideas, and then senior management selects four to go into idea testing.

"In the second phase of Eureka,

we take those four ideas and assess them with Merwyn Research, a software program that evaluates the group's ideas based on other ideas' successes," Pital noted. "The software generates a score for each idea and, based on that information, the client chooses two ideas to focus on."

The third phase of Eureka – TrailBlazer – is a 30-day research-intensive coaching process to make a decision on whether to develop the two ideas. If the decision is "yes," the idea will proceed into a development phase. Over time, the goal is for the company to have a continuous "idea pipeline," with ideas in different stages of incubation and development.

Research underscores the importance of manufacturers competing based on innovation. The 2005 Georgia Manufacturing Survey – conducted by the Enterprise Innovation Institute and the School of Public Policy at Georgia Tech – showed that innovative companies reported returns on sales 50 percent higher than companies that compete by providing low cost products; paid workers a third more than the average Georgia manufacturer; and were 40 percent less likely to lose work to outsourcing than were companies competing on low cost.

"Innovation, whether in products or processes, or in organization or services to customers, is one of the main paths through which manufacturers can become more distinctive, secure market premiums, satisfy customers, expand sales, reward workers

and improve their bottom line," explained Phil Shapira, a professor in the School of Public Policy and a study co-author. "Companies that do not continuously innovate will find themselves under increasing pressure from low-cost producers in the United States and globally."

One such company that experienced firsthand the pressures of foreign competition is [Woodbury Box](#). Since its founding in 1946, the Thomaston, Ga.-based business has manufactured everything from peach boxes to caskets to rolling rods to, ultimately, industrial mop hardware. CEO Susan Hall says that the company, one of the first in Georgia to go through the Eureka process, has had to be innovative in order to survive changing markets.

With assistance from Pital, Hall and her staff developed two new ideas for product development: a collapsible mop handle and high-end wire gardening baskets. The collapsible mop handle offers an industrial strength handle at the right price point, and can save freight costs and maximize space utilization. The wire garden baskets are being unveiled at a trade show next month, and Hall has been meeting with developers about using the containers everywhere from Atlantic Station to Disney World.

"Eureka has really been a good experience. It has put our minds on the right track and helped us find new ideas and new products," said Hall, who is currently in the middle of the 30-day coaching process. "The

best thing about running Eureka through Georgia Tech has been the follow-up and accountability. Georgia Tech has so much they can bring to the table, and we have gotten so much more out of the experience than we expected."

Since MEP began offering Eureka through its state partnerships, approximately 15 projects have been completed nationally. For more information on Eureka, contact Don Pital at 770-595-8921 or don.pital@innovate.gatech.edu or Derek Woodham at 706-881-0535 or derek.woodham@innovate.gatech.edu.

About the Enterprise Innovation Institute:

The Georgia Tech Enterprise Innovation Institute helps companies, entrepreneurs, economic developers and communities improve their competitiveness through the application of science, technology and innovation. It is one of the most comprehensive university-based programs of business and industry assistance, technology commercialization and economic development in the nation.

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