HYTROL CONVEYOR COMPANY SUCCESS STORY

SNAPSHOT

The Situation

Hytrol Conveyor Company is a world leader in the design and manufacturing of technologically advanced material handling and automation systems for a variety of industries. The company, headquartered in Jonesboro, AR, is experiencing rapid growth due to the global increase in e-commerce and the demand to move more products, faster.

The Challenge

Hytrol is facing a complex workforce development challenge as the company scales to meet increased demand. Developing and retaining talent is crucial to the success of businesses in Northeast Arkansas.

The Solution

Hytrol is actively building a cohesive network of relationships with educational stakeholders around the state of Arkansas to develop future talent. Simultaneously, Hytrol is developing innovative internal programs to enhance and retain existing talent.

The Results

Hytrol's collaboration with educational stakeholders is the foundation of a robust employee pipeline to the company. In addition, Hytrol has taken steps to formulate internal programs that address talent retention and growth. Overall, Hytrol is contributing to the growth of the economic ecosystem in Jonesboro, the Northeast Arkansas region, and the state.

Hytrol Conveyor Company is a world leader in the design and manufacturing of material handling systems for a variety of industries. Hytrol was founded in Wisconsin in 1947 but relocated to Jonesboro, Arkansas, in 1962 with 26 employees.

Since then, Hytrol has grown to be one of the largest employers in Jonesboro, with more than 1,300 employees. **In 2016, Hytrol completed a $12 million expansion that demonstrated the company's commitment to Northeast Arkansas.**

"It is really humbling to understand the history of Hytrol. Hytrol is a great example of an Arkansas-based manufacturing company that has created great jobs for Arkansans for decades," said Mike Preston, Arkansas Secretary of Commerce and Executive Director of the Arkansas Economic Development Commission.

FAST FACT

Hytrol is the largest conveyor manufacturer in North America.

"The technology that Hytrol continues to add to the Jonesboro facility keeps the company on the forefront of 21st-century manufacturing."

The company is experiencing rapid growth due to the global increase in e-commerce and the demand to move more products, faster. Hytrol faces a complex workforce development challenge as the company scales to meet demand.

Developing and retaining talent is crucial to the success of businesses in Northeast Arkansas. Companies across the state compete for skilled and unskilled labor. **While Jonesboro is one of the fastest growing cities in Arkansas, the city's unemployment rate is at an all-time low of 2.8%.** These factors make scaling a business more difficult.

To address this workforce development issue, Hytrol is actively building a cohesive network of relationships with educational stakeholders around the state of Arkansas to develop future talent. Simultaneously, Hytrol is developing internal programs to enhance and retain existing talent.

"Meaningful collaboration is the hallmark of Hytrol's academic partnership initiative. From kindergarten through career, Hytrol strategically partners with a network of educational institutions and programs serving various ages across the city, state, and region."

-Natalie Shew, Manager of Academic Partnerships, Hytrol

"The goals of the initiative are to increase the flow of talent to Hytrol, cultivate a thriving workforce, and boost economic outcomes for the company and the region."

Research collaboration between industry and academia with a strong intent to commercialize is a significant catalyst for economic growth in Arkansas, and Hytrol is leading the way in this area.

Generating interest in Arkansas businesses, applied skills in STEM, and personal connections with industry at an early age are crucial in developing future leaders who will stay and contribute to Arkansas's economy. For this reason, **Hytrol is focused on building a robust pipeline of talent, starting at the K-12 level.**

Hytrol participates in community programs that allow students to interact with the company and gain an understanding of the manufacturing industry. By inviting younger students into Hytrol's production facility, the company is changing the perception of manufacturing and encouraging students to consider careers in the industry.

A group of students visited Hytrol's facility on Manufacturing Day. Area high schools were invited to tour the production facility and engage in a hands-on demonstration of conveyor assembly. Students in attendance expressed an interest in pursuing a career in manufacturing.



Photo courtesy of Hytrol Conveyor Company



Photo courtesy of Hytrol Conveyor Company

Another group of students from the "Girls in STEM" program at the Museum of Discovery visited Hytrol to learn about careers in science, technology, engineering, and math. Participants learned about Hytrol's technologically advanced manufacturing facility and toured the company's Technology Center to learn more about the material handling industry.

"It is important that girls know the opportunities available to them in a STEM career," said Hytrol Systems Product Engineer Lisa Richardson, who led Hytrol's activities for the group. "My hope is that they take these experiences and grow their interest in STEM."

Also, Hytrol participates in the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's STRIVE program, which provides 7th through 12th-grade teachers with experiences to help students become more prepared for the STEM workforce.

While educating younger students is a crucial component of creating a pipeline of talent, Hytrol invests significantly in research and commercialization efforts with higher education partners that are geared towards solving real-world issues in the material handling and automation industries.

Hytrol also partners with the Northeast Arkansas Career and Tech Center, along with Arkansas State University Newport, to sponsor hands-on learning experiences for students to build advanced manufacturing skills.

In another collaboration, Hytrol and the University of Arkansas at Little Rock's George W. Donaghey Emerging Analytics Center created an augmented reality environment that Hytrol uses to show its customers what kind of conveyor systems they are buying. The client experience studio is one feature of the company's newly renovated $1.5 million technology center.

Hytrol has a long-standing partnership with Arkansas State University. **In 2015, Hytrol established a $200,000 endowment for engineering and computer science scholarships.** Students at Arkansas State University are employed in internships and post-graduate careers.

Hytrol partners with Arkansas State University on a materials handling laboratory that is used to train engineering students. The company equipped the laboratory with a fully functional conveyor system, along with instrumentation and controls.



Photo courtesy of Hytrol Conveyor Company

"The College of Engineering and Computer Science very much appreciates the partnership with and the very strong support from Hytrol on a wide variety of initiatives. A flagship initiative was the establishment of a Materials Handling Laboratory led by the Mechanical Engineering Program Director, Dr. Shivan Haran, with a gift of a state-of-the-art materials handling system and assistance from Hytrol," said Dr. Abhijit Bhattacharyya, Dean of Engineering at Arkansas State University.

"Engineers from Hytrol have been very generous with their time in coming to the college and giving lectures on materials handling/control systems."

President of Hytrol David Peacock emphasized the importance of partnerships like the one between Hytrol and Arkansas State University.

"Our vision is to connect future generations of people, products, and solutions by pushing the limits of what is possible in material handling. This lab gives Hytrol that connection to the young men and women of A-State who are seeking to make that difference," Peacock said.

The company recognizes that pursuing research in a Hytrol vacuum limits the reach of a project. By collaborating with academic and community partners, Hytrol is amplifying the potential impact of new technologies and innovations.

To retain talent, Hytrol is developing a formalized skills-share program to encourage its employees to donate their expertise to community members and statewide STEM initiatives. Employees volunteer with students at Vex robotics competitions at Jonesboro High School, Tekstarz summer manufacturing camp, drone racing instruction, business competitions, and other STEM-related events.

Through skills sharing, Hytrol sees an increase in job satisfaction and productivity. Employees feel connected to the community and part of something bigger than the work they produce for the company.

Additionally, Hytrol partnered with the Arkansas Economic Development Commission's Manufacturing Solutions division to develop a leadership development program. Manufacturing Solutions delivered team training for 45 members of the leadership team, which established a continuous improvement environment, a cohesive team, and engaged team leaders.

By prioritizing collaboration with educational and community stakeholders, Hytrol is successfully creating a sustainable employee pipeline. In addition, Hytrol is retaining and growing talent by focusing on internal training and professional development programs.

In the future, Hytrol plans to increase its research and commercialization efforts among higher education partners across the state and region. Through awareness, education, and impact, Hytrol is directly contributing to the growth of the economic ecosystem in the city of Jonesboro, the Northeast Arkansas region, and the state of Arkansas.

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