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YourEncore's corps of scientists, engineers helps Cincinnati's P&G, others fight fires

Business Courier of Cincinnati - by [Lisa Biank Fasig](#) Staff Reporter

When Hurricane Katrina mangled its Louisiana coffee roasting plants in 2005, **Procter & Gamble Co.** chose a nontraditional route to getting its sub rosa systems running again. In addition to tapping into its own vast force of experts, it turned to outsiders.

Within hours, three retired engineers were enroute to New Orleans, joining a P&G team to perform triage on the woebegone facilities. Together, they got fresh water flowing; in two months, the lines were up and rolling.

The engineers' origin: **YourEncore**, a Cincin-nati- and Indianapolis-based collaboration of almost 6,000 retired scientists and researchers. The brainchild of P&G, YourEncore – now a private company – works with dozens of such corporations to fire-fight needs ranging from natural disasters to package design.

Today, YourEncore is a significant component to, and product of, P&G's flourishing Connect + Develop program, launched in 2000 to goose up innovation by linking up P&G's own talent with outside experts.

“We’ve discovered we have virtually hundreds of ways that retired scientists and engineers can help P&G,” said Karen Kreutz, section head of Connect + Develop’s R&D. “They’ve been continuously rising to the challenges that P&G sends their way.”

YourEncore's performance recently earned it an “enabling partner of the year” award from P&G.

Online ‘innovation community’

But YourEncore experts service more than P&G. Since its founding, YourEncore helped complete roughly 2,000 projects for more than 30 companies. And in 2008, it expanded its network to Europe. But P&G remains its largest client, accounting for 600 projects.

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It operates as an online “innovation community,” where technical virtuosos are matched with corporate needs. Often, these are highly specialized needs that require the retirees to collaborate with the client company’s own staff. Sometimes, the clients are suppliers that seek out P&G retirees specifically, to help them better prepare to do business with the consumer products maker.

“From Procter’s perspective, their belief is that some of the best-found ideas are outside of the company,” said Ali Dibadj, an analyst covering P&G for **Sanford C. Bernstein** in New York. “That has been part of their process for years, to be more efficient in R&D.”

Which explains the genesis of YourEncore. P&G hatched the idea back in 2003, as its Connect + Develop program was yielding its earliest crops of fruit.

P&G discovered much promise in the minds of retired scientists and engineers of the world and looked to see if other companies would as well. Many – including **Eli Lilly** and **Boeing Co.** – said yes. Soon after, **General Mills** joined, too.

Boeing alone has recorded 65,000 project hours with YourEncore – in its commercial and defense businesses – as well as R&D activities, said Lynne Wenberg, a senior manager at Boeing Research & Technology. Boeing has tapped its own retirees to mentor and coach employees and has used retirees from other organizations to help with proposal work and process improvements.

“We’ve used some experts from P&G, which you would think is a very different company from Boeing,” Wenberg said. “But we found ways to leverage their expertise, and vice versa.”

YourEncore is now owned by Indianapolis consultant **Bernard & Associates**. Many of its clients rank in the Fortune 500. Its experts come from more than 1,000 public, academic and government organizations.

“The network is made up primarily of retirees who want to stay retired, yet engaged, and engaged on their terms,” said Peter Kleinhenz, global account director at YourEncore, who is responsible for P&G. “We work with our clients to collaborate on what the problem is. What’s the outage, the innovation challenge? We go to work on matching the talent in our network with those requirements.”

And a level of privacy. YourEncore experts, while working on P&G assignments, are subject to noncompete contracts. For P&G, their work has included launching production lines, advising on divestitures and consumer understanding.

One expert contracted by P&G helped shorten a problem-solving process to six months, from 14. The results were as good, and at a lower cost.

“Agility is the key,” Kreutz said. “They don’t have to focus on anything but their technical work. They tend to be very efficient and quick.”

And efficiency means putting the experts where the clients need them, reducing travel time and expense. YourEncore expanded its network to the United Kingdom in 2008 and, in October, to Germany.

Next, Kleinhenz expects YourEncore to radiate into Asia and Latin America, markets that are fast expanding and are among those on which P&G itself is focusing. It is a long way from Louisiana, but natural disasters, and consumerism, have few borders.

“We’re going to follow P&G where they will take us,” Kleinhenz said. “P&G has been very good at pointing the direction in which we should head.”

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