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NEWS RELEASE

Tim Mead, commercial director at GB Innomech hosted an automation and manufacturing workshop at the Bench to Boardroom one day networking event and exhibition organised by One Nucleus (8 Mar 2011, Newmarket Racecourse; see www.onenucleus.com for more information).

Below is a summary of the workshop output.

From prototype to production: defining a process

The workshop generated some enthusiastic discussion about what makes automation projects go well, supporting the transition from prototype to first production units.

The variety of different viewpoints represented, ranging from medical device manufacture through biotech to venture capital, ensured that the entire development process was scrutinised. Several key themes emerged from the contributions.

1) Developing an agreed specification

There was a general agreement from the workshop participants that a sound specification was critical, demanding discipline to restrain the scope and clarity and leading to a spec freeze. Developments in the project do not then open opportunities to add features or capability. It is often essential to recognise that a spec that is sufficient to deliver a marketable first product that is 'good enough' – allowing for follow up with an updated model or product upgrades. Delaying market launch in order to add better features or minimise costs can be very expensive in terms of lost market position and increased development time, which impacts on investors' rate of return. It is often the case that the benefit of extra features or the cost savings of a budget reduction are outweighed by the cost of the extra time.

2) Maintaining open communication at all times

At all stages, open communication between all project groups is vital, with no hidden discussions or topics that become off limits. In many projects, areas that are regarded as simple and low risk are started early in order to demonstrate progress. This can be counterproductive, as it masks the critical areas. The aim should be to de-risk the project at every stage, starting with a documented

risk assessment involving technical staff and operators. High risk areas of the process can then be addressed early through modelling, simulation, practical experimental work and prototyping.

3) Investing in UK design, development AND manufacturing

Enabling developments from prototype to production in this way should fit well with the current stated national goals of promoting the UK manufacturing base. It is possible that this will require a longer term business view than has been prevalent of late, perhaps reflecting some of the attitudes that are common in France and Germany, where high priority has been given to supporting manufacturing. However, with cost inflation taking hold in many previously low cost economies such as China and India, and the global trade in commodities bringing common prices around the world, there is every reason to believe that an efficient automated manufacturing process based in the UK can compete in any marketplace.

About GB Innomech

GB Innomech (Innomech) specialises in automating highly complex and labour-intensive manufacturing processes to maximise outputs, improve product quality and boost business performance. The company works with major international manufacturers in sectors such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices and environmental, as well as earlier-stage businesses looking to bring breakthrough technologies or products to market.

Innomech has a growing market reputation for solving the toughest of manufacturing problems by the early identification and management of risk, often cross-fertilising technologies and techniques from a range of industry sectors. All projects from initial feasibility studies through to building production-scale machines are conducted to high specification pharmaceutical industry standards and are designed to comply with GAMP5, FDA and other international standards.