



**Office Locations:**  
Boise, Caldwell,  
Idaho Falls, Post Falls

TECHHELP IDAHO Provides technical assistance, training, and information to strengthen the competitiveness of Idaho manufacturers through product and process improvements. Contact: Gary Thompson, Boise State University, 1910 University Dr., Mailstop 1656, Boise, ID 83725, (208) 426-3689, Fax: (208) 426-2185, Email: gthomps@boisestate.edu, Website: <http://www.techhelp.org>

**THE  
MANUFACTURING  
EXTENSION  
PARTNERSHIP  
IN IDAHO**

Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) is a nationwide system of services and support for smaller manufacturers to become more globally competitive. At the heart of the system is a network of affiliated, locally-based manufacturing extension centers. Each center, like TechHelp Idaho, is a partnership, typically involving federal, state, and local governments; industry; educational institutions; and other sources of expertise, information and funding support.

**COMPANY CLIPS**

**Focused Business Strategy Leads To Huge Growth At Now Disc**

Now Disc Optical Media Solutions is a compact disc duplication company. Established in 1996, the company employs 30 people in its production facility in Boise. In addition to duplicating CD-ROMs, Now Disc also molds and presses its own discs.

When Now Disc was launched in 1996, it had few competitors in disc duplication; however, by mid-2001, a number of companies had entered the field. Now Disc also felt challenged by additional competition from CD duplication equipment on the Internet. The company recognized that a big step was needed if it was going to separate itself from its competitors. It saw the need for an aggressive growth strategy to become a market leader and further recognized that this would require strategic management skills from both within and outside the organization. Now Disc asked Idaho TechHelp (TechHelp) to give strategic planning and business advice.

Over a two-year period TechHelp helped Now Disc's management team develop and implement a strategic direction that has seen the company evolve into a market leader with state-of-the-art equipment and exclusive technology. TechHelp's professional business advisor worked directly with the company's founder and CEO, Brian Powell, to establish a stronger, expanded Board of Directors and develop strategies to improve decision-making, risk assessment, and development skills among the company's senior management team to support anticipated growth.

Early in 2002, on TechHelp's advice, Now Disc purchased a \$2 million digital printing-machine and started filling large volume custom disc orders. The machine also gave the company the ability to produce anti-piracy digital watermarks. With the machine, Now Disc is meeting a demand from software companies for mass-customization and can print 6,000 unique discs per hour. The move to a digital watermark capability and a data

*Continued*

**STATE STATS**

DATA\* COVERS JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2001

- Number of projects completed with firms  
**86**
- Number of firms served  
**66**
- Number of firms served for the first time  
**33**
- Federal cost share for current operating year  
**\$758,800**
- State/other cost share for current operating year  
**\$1,517,600**

*\*Data as reported from center*

DATA\*\* COVERS JANUARY TO DECEMBER 2001

- Increased sales & retained sales  
**\$10,150,000**
- Client capital investment  
**\$4,398,501**
- Total cost savings  
**\$34,040,405**
- Jobs (created & retained)  
**104**

*\*\*Source: Independent client impact survey*

**For additional information,  
contact Dede McMahon 301-975-5020**



duplication process that can handle large amounts of information is transforming Now Disc's operations. After implementing these changes, Now Disc secured several multi-million dollar contracts, spurring exponential growth and the creation of 10 new jobs. Thanks to its far-sighted management team and the assistance of TechHelp, the company was ready to embrace its growth.

### **Lean Training Brings Cultural Shift To Advanced Input Devices**

Advanced Input Devices designs and manufactures a wide variety of specialty input panels and keyboards for use in the original equipment manufacturing electronic equipment market. With approximately 350 employees, the firm is ISO 9000 certified and operates out of a modern manufacturing facility in Coeur d'Alene. Its customer base includes a number of large capital equipment manufacturers. The company has sustained steady growth over the past decade to become one of the major employers in northern Idaho.

As a player in the highly competitive contract engineering and manufacturing business, Advanced Input Devices (AID) quickly realized the need for high quality, rapid response, and low cost within the market segment. Top management made the decision to pursue lean manufacturing as a company-wide initiative several years ago, but needed a powerful training tool to affect the desired change in the company's culture. AID contacted Idaho TechHelp (TechHelp) for assistance.

TechHelp's Lean 101 workshop turned out to be the powerful tool for which AID had been searching. The company participated in seven Lean 101 sessions for associates at all levels of the organization. The training and related electronic assembly simulation provided employees with knowledge of lean principles and, perhaps more importantly, a keen awareness of the need to change the status quo. The company capitalized on this new outlook by forming its own rapid improvement teams and encouraging innovation in its manufacturing systems using lean principles as the guide. Several immediate benefits include a 75 percent reduction in the time it takes to process a return, a 20 percent reduction in required space needed to produce 20 percent more product, a 40 to 50 percent reduction in cycle times, and a 90 percent reduction in machine downtimes. Convinced of the value of the training, AID is sponsoring a Lean 101 session for representatives from all divisions of its parent company to introduce them to this fundamental building block for lean implementations.