

Innovation is the LIFE BLOOD OF BUSINESS

Do you feel that you are being innovative in your business? If the answer is no, then you should take a look at not only your business, but also yourself – and you may be surprised. By **Paula Beare**

IT IS GENERALLY accepted that there are four Cs of Innovation – Creativity, Connections, Collaboration and Commercialisation. Some are easier to be involved with or achieved than others, but each is a key element behind every innovative or entrepreneurial endeavour. In Australia, innovation is celebrated in many

ways – and a key event on the Australian business calendar is the annual Innovation Festival which commences on World IP Day.

The 2010 Australian Innovation Festival, held between the 26th of April and the 30th of May, has the theme of "Building

Sustainable Businesses", and focuses on the 4Cs of Innovation. The festival aims to highlight the importance of innovation during this period of regeneration from last year's global economic uncertainty. Recent times have shown that more than ever, organisations, in particular businesses, need to "innovate" to meet the challenge of increased competition and ever-changing consumer and market needs.

The festival was established in 2002 to support and promote the best of Australian innovation and entrepreneurship and since its conception has increased in size and range with virtually every major town and city in Australia being in either the festival or associated festivals. It is now the largest Australian industry festival and, during the five weeks it runs, festival coordinators anticipate that up to 400,000 participants will attend the five hundred plus events. Over fifty of these are linked to BECs in some way and form part of the 2010 BEC Australia Innovation Festival, an associated festival of the Australian Innovation Festival, itself in its second year.

Every day around Australia, the network of Business Enterprise Centres which are members of BEC Australia assist small and micro business owners to build ▶



(L-R) Belmont BEC Committee member, Raj Selvendra; Belmont BEC Chair, Tim Hammond; Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard; and CEO Belmont BEC & TCFWA, Carol Hanlon

sustainable businesses. One of the many ways this is done is to host events that allow the business owner to spend quality time working on, rather than in, their business. These events range from informal networking where business owners can connect with other business people from their area, to structured workshops and seminars which inform and educate on business issues. Session topics range from planning to ensure your business is sustainable, through to how to commercialise your ideas, or sharing innovative marketing tips to capitalise on current consumer trends.

Every event allows a business owner to connect with someone – be it an expert in the field being addressed, a business facilitator or another business person. Discussions during the event and subsequent sessions with the local BEC team allow the business owner to express their creativity to overcome problems or issues in the business and to find solutions to ensure that their business will succeed.

Collaborative approach

Indeed, it is the collaborative approach of the BEC facilitators that makes the network a success. As we have noted in many previous articles, our facilitators are the friend of a small business – always there to assist and provide guidance, while empowering the business owner to make the decisions that one needs to make when you run your own business.

The 50+ events listed on the Australian Innovation website as being part of the BEC Australia Innovation festival are just the tip of the iceberg of the BEC Australia network's offerings during the 2010 BEC Australia Innovation Festival. To contact your local BEC and see what is on offer in your area, find their contact details on our website: www.becaustrialia.org.au

If, in the rare case there are no events scheduled, then contact your BEC and make an appointment to see a facilitator and enjoy the one-on-one service for

which the BECs are renowned. You'll be amazed at how reaching out and connecting with a BEC can enhance your business – the confidential and independent business advice is truly what sets the network apart from other organisations. Your BEC is able to respond to the needs of the local small business community and many events are structured and planned in response to queries and areas of concern in their area.

One centre that has responded not only to the local community, but also those of the Fashion and Textile Clothing and Footwear (TCF) is Belmont BEC in Perth, recognised as an Industry specialist BEC in Australia.

In 2005, the Belmont BEC, through its strategic relationship with the designedge Fashion Incubator, joined the Australian Innovation festival as the designedge Innovation Festival. Since that time, the team from Belmont has been running statewide and national events for their innovation festival. Their focus is to celebrate creativity, design technology and inventors throughout Australia through an extensive range of workshops, seminars, forums and displays. For a number of years this festival has been the largest community national innovation festival associated with the Australian Innovation festival.

On April 29, Belmont BEC Chair Mr. Tim Hammond welcomed the Federal Small Business Minister Dr Craig Emerson to Belmont to launch the designedge Innovation Festival & WA Program of Australia Innovation Festival held at the City of Belmont Civic Centre. There are over 52 events listed in the 2010 designedge festival delivering workshop topics unique to the fashion, TCF industry small businesses.

All Western Australia events are hosted at Belmont BEC and events in other states are usually hosted by, or linked to BECs. The festival features specialised industry leaders presenting workshops, and in

2010 the focus is on eCommerce and website development, thanks to TCFWA funding through AusIndustry's Small Business Online Program.

Competitive edge

Belmont BEC Manager, Carol Hanlon, is the key driving force behind the designedge Innovation Festival, and also responsible for BEC Australia becoming involved with the Innovation festival. When asked why she was so passionate about the festival and the significance of innovation to Australian business, she said: "Australia's small business competitive advantage is its innovation and creativity, in particular its ability to respond quickly to the needs of the global market. To respond quickly, business needs to be innovative, resourceful and creative in both thinking and application to meet those needs. This is why we have managed so well in the current global economy. In addition through innovation, Australian businesses have created niche product designs to meet global needs."

So, no matter what industry you are part of, there is sure to be a festival that will offer you and your business the opportunity to connect with other business people and to gain some insight into how to make your business sustainable. For further information on the Australian Innovation Festival, the BEC Australia Innovation Festival or the designedge Festival, go to the Australian Innovation Festival website: www.ausinnovation.org and search for events noting the applicable festival in the drop down menu. ●

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