



# THE INDUSTRIAL CAREERS PATHWAY®

**A Pathway to...**

**Good Careers**  
**Good People**  
**Good Business**



**2008/Vol. 3**

**The Industrial Careers Pathway®**

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## **Making the Case for Industrial Distribution Workforce Development**

Workforce development is the rubric under which government and foundations undertake or support programs to prepare individuals for employment and connect people with jobs. The Industrial Careers Pathway® looks to expand its efforts to meet the industrial distribution sector's need for sales and customer service employees today and tomorrow. To leverage the support provided by industrial distributors, manufacturers and associations, our interest lies in connecting with government and foundations so we must look at our workforce issues as government and foundations do.

Broadly speaking, there are two major drivers for government and foundation-supported workforce development efforts. The first: assisting people without stable employment who face employment challenges to develop skills that will allow them to obtain jobs. For this driver, the "customer" is the individual—the displaced worker, the drop-out, the person with a disability and other categories of those who need to enter the workforce.

The second driver is the economy—national, state/provincial or local—that requires categories of employees to fill positions to sustain economic activity and business viability. For this driver, the "customer" is large employment sectors that need people with specific skills such as health care, oil and gas or advanced manufacturing industries.

Industrial distribution has a case to be made on both counts, but there is much work to be done in articulating and making that case. Our "customers"—the thousands of people industrial distributors need to hire annually to fill their crucial sales positions—often do not need four-year degrees or extensive advanced training. They can be at the beginning or in the middle of their work lives. They can be just about anywhere in North America.

But these jobs—offering a living wage with benefits, located in good workplaces, providing various career pathways—are unfamiliar to most people who might be ideally suited for them. Together, as proponents for the industry, we need to do a better job of packaging these opportunities in such a way that governments and foundations see them as a good option for a workforce sector we are collectively interested in. The perception is that there are two categories of jobs for the future: high-skilled jobs requiring advanced degrees and extensive training or low-skill jobs that pay poorly and have no career pathway. Industrial distribution needs to work against that perception, fighting back with the knowledge that for the 65 percent of those between 25 and 34 who do not have two years or more of postsecondary education, there is another option.

The case for the role of industrial distribution in the economy also needs to be made more strongly. There is little understanding of the vital importance of a strong supply chain as an economic engine. The movement of goods and the connection of industry

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[www.industrialcareerspathway.org](http://www.industrialcareerspathway.org)

# Industrial Distribution Workforce Development

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needs with industry resources in a timely and efficient manner is crucial. Yet there is little understanding about its importance on the part of many government decision-makers and, certainly, by foundations. Time and again, manufacturing is identified as an economic development/workforce development priority without any consideration of the supply chain that works with and supports it.

Without a prepared sales and service workforce able to make the necessary connections and work with industry in solving its problems and meeting its product needs, the supply chain will begin to break down.



It's up to the skilled and experienced workforce in industrial distribution—whose exodus is pending—to make governments and those concerned with economic strength as concerned about the industrial distribution sector as with the rest of the supply chain. (As an aside, the very job categories “inside” and “outside sales” can work against that understanding as those job titles

do not sound like critical positions for sustaining the supply chain. Another issue for another day.)

As we move ahead in developing a case that will make sense to government and foundation decision makers, we have great opportunities to partner with others who are looking at workforce development.

For example, in addition to working with community and technical colleges in communities, we need to reach out to the national and state or provincial organizations to build partnerships. One such group is the American Association of Community Colleges whose CEO suggested in *Manufacturing Leadership* that business could take steps to “improve the future of their companies and the competitiveness of American industry.” Let's engage this group in working with us to make the case for resources and support.



Also, the Skills2Compete initiative is a national effort in the United States to build awareness of the “middle skill jobs,” which require some post-secondary education, but less than a four-year degree. Those involved are gathering data and starting to make the case that everyone should have access to two

years of post-secondary education. Perhaps this initiative is one of multiple opportunities to partner with those looking at workforce development more broadly than the current narrow categories mentioned earlier.

It is relatively easy for government and foundations to understand that if we don't have an adequate pool of prepared employees in nursing, our health care system is in jeopardy. It's our job to make the strong case that if we don't have an adequate pool of prepared people in industrial distribution, our supply chain is in jeopardy—which is just as important to the vitality of our economy.

## Industrial Careers Pathway®

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Association

# Widgets & Warlocks Web 2.0: The Quest for Talent

By Shawn Chambers, Warehoused Plastic Sales, Inc.



I sit in a class of about 40 students, most between 17 and 21 years old. They all have laptops and, with the campus being one giant hotspot, many walk across the yards engaged in some activity on them. The class starts but you'd never know it with everyone focused on their

displays responding to instant messages, fighting witches and ogres playing team-Warcraft, watching last week's episode of "The Office," touring MySpace and Facebook sites, or just watching their favorite celebrities fall apart in a real time reality show hosted by gossip bloggers such as Perez Hilton. For the most part, the students respect the etiquette of turning off their ring tones but have no qualms about interrupting the lecture to leave the class to take the call.

It all came to a head when the professor lost it and shared their frustration in lecturing to "an empty room." This is your next generation of employees. These are the people you'll be handing your customers over to. Be afraid. Be very afraid.

Our order desk, here in the Great White North, is made up of 20-30 somethings. Social networking is as much a part of their life as getting together with friends after work or on the weekends but it's different from what I see on the campus. It's my humble opinion that our current employees are the last generation that can separate the real world from the not-so-real world of interpersonal relationships.

For them, there was home, school, after-school, and the weekend—and each had its own unique cast of characters with time and space in between. They grew up traveling to their social groups—the arena, the dance hall, the local amateur theatre, and the chess club—where they regaled in their life stories since the last time they met. Now, it's all merged into one. Weekend friends and teammates are all interconnected with their co-workers through their buddy lists and friends pages, and it's a 24/7, never-ending dialogue back and forth.

In 2003, I spoke at the International Association of Plastics Distribution (IAPD) conference in New Orleans outlining five threats to our industry, one of which is our collective challenge in attracting fresh talent. My original argument was based on the fact that recent graduates couldn't afford to work for us based on the size of their student loans.

But, it's bigger than that—I don't think we have what they want. Not unlike The Borg of Star Trek mythology, this next generation of workers experienced their formative years as

an interconnected collective developing a generation-wide hive mind. Transitioning from their home, to the car, to their cubicle will simply be a shift in network connectivity (read up on Microsoft's new auto platform) rather than a shift in social structure. The collective will provide the answers to their questions and motivation for getting through their day.

Older supervisors will find it incredibly frustrating because these people won't want to come to them for answers or guidance—it's not their way. In fact, a lot of supervisors will be misjudged by old school managers because it will appear they have no respect from their workers when, in fact, the workers have no use for the corporate structure. Supervisors and managers will try to connect with the usual carrot and stick, but the effect will be less than rewarding for everyone involved.

Generation "Why" is one of intrinsic collectivism—they've grown up playing team-oriented video games with no other objective than to solve intricate puzzles for a prize that has no value beyond their sense of purpose in playing the game. And, this, too, is going to be a problem when they jump onto your order entry and customer service software. It's not fun. It's not entertaining. There are no Easter eggs. And, if their supervisor doesn't come across as an Indiana Jones archetype, willing to lead them on some great adventure, they won't have much use for them or their job at all. We've moved beyond the constructs of loyalty and the fear/respect paradigm—remember, Generation "Why" is about disengaged engagement.

We have to acknowledge that we have a new customer in our midst, one that isn't looking for an employer, but a real-life game site. We have to engineer a service product, marketing "the adventure" of distribution rather than trying to fill a "job." We have to rework our software in terms of widgets and interconnected-thought, implementing a game-like feel to it to fully engage the user. We have to think of incentives in terms of advancing "levels of play" and an underlying theme or puzzle to each position, and when they solve it, the rewards come in terms of health points rather than just "gold"—more time off—since this will also be a generation of exploration, where keeping up with the Jones' will have more to do with meeting their neighbor in some far-off land rather than outdoing their holiday decorations. They will exist in a minimalist lifestyle with a great need to experience and share their world rather than own it. And, that is where old and new will collide—for them, it's not about the bottom line anymore.

*This article originally appeared in the February/ March 2008 edition of The IAPD Magazine. Shawn Chambers is a plastics distribution executive and regular contributor to the official magazine of the International Association of Plastics Distribution. Visit IAPD at [iapd.org](http://iapd.org); contact Shawn at +1.416.218.4300 or [shawn.chambers@wps.on.ca](mailto:shawn.chambers@wps.on.ca).*

# 2008 Fund Drive Contributors

The 2008 Fund Drive has made giant strides! As of June 10, 2008:

**97** individuals, companies and organizations have contributed a total of \$172,776.

**12** individuals, companies and organizations have contributed to the fund drive for the first time or after a four-year lapse in support.

**60** individuals, companies and organizations have made leadership level gifts or pledges of \$1,000 or more.

For an up-to-date list, visit [www.ptda.org/ICP/FundDrive](http://www.ptda.org/ICP/FundDrive).



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The following list reflects contributions made between March 6 - June 10.

## Partner and Investor Contributors \$15,000 and Above

Tomkins Corporation Foundation

## Stakeholder Contributors \$5,000 - \$14,999

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## Colleague Contributors \$250 - \$499

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## Associate Contributors \$100 - \$249

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## ICP Schools Offer Industrial Distribution Course

For the fall semester of 2008, the following schools plan to offer ICP's industrial distribution introduction course. For more information on these courses, visit [www.industrialcareerspathway.org](http://www.industrialcareerspathway.org) or contact ICP at +1.312.516.2100.

British Columbia Institute of Technology  
Burnaby, British Columbia, Canada  
"Essentials of Industrial Distribution"  
(MKTG-1150)  
Wednesdays, 6:45 p.m. - 9:45 p.m.  
Sept. 10 - Nov. 26

Cuyahoga Community College  
Cleveland, Ohio  
"Introduction to Industrial Distribution"  
(BADM-1030)  
Thursdays, 6:00 p.m. - 8:50 p.m.  
Aug. 23 - Dec. 17

Dakota County Technical College  
Rosemount, Minn.  
"Introduction to Distribution Careers Online"  
(SMGT 1080)  
Various days and times  
Sept. 4 - Oct. 2

Henry Ford Community College  
Dearborn, Mich.  
"Introduction to Industrial Distribution"  
(BBA 161)  
Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. - 10:50 a.m.  
Oct. 16 - Dec. 13

Metropolitan Community College  
Omaha, Neb.  
"Introduction to Distribution"  
(INCT 1500)  
Self-study/independent  
Various days and times

Mid Florida Tech  
Orlando, Fla.  
"Industrial Distribution and Management"  
Saturdays, time to be determined  
Sept. 2008 - Jan. 2009

Mohawk College  
Hamilton, Ontario, Canada  
"Essentials of Industrial Distribution"  
Date and time to be determined for fall semester