

**ONLINE EXCLUSIVE:
AME Establishes Its Own Consortia Program**

By Keith Syberg

AME is pleased to announce the creation of its new national Consortia Program. An agreement has been reached with Optima Associates of De Pere, WI, to serve as AME's primary resource for establishing and facilitating dozens of consortia throughout the country during the next several years.



AME has long considered establishing a Consortia Program to support and enhance its traditional strengths of regional events and a highly successful annual international conference. In fact, in 2009, in conjunction with the annual conference, the association established its first consortium in Northern Kentucky with 15 companies. Three years later, that consortium numbers 17 members and is now considered a significant business resource in the region. AME plans to build on this success with the help of Optima.

After six months of review at the national AME Board level and a particular focus on collaboration with AME Regional Presidents, plans are now under way for the initial phase of activities that will lead to establishment of the second new consortium by the end of 2012. Initial target cities include Cincinnati, Indianapolis, Atlanta, Miami, Pittsburgh, Rochester, NY, San Diego and Cleveland. It is anticipated that five to 10 locations will be developed by the end of 2014.

AME has a strong vision for its consortia model. First, all companies and their representatives will be located within a 60-mile radius of each other to facilitate deep, personal and frequent contact among members. Second, each consortium will be strongly in control of its own program and membership. While each group

will fall under the legal guidelines of AME's 501c3 non-profit status, individual groups will establish membership guidelines, program content, fee structure and local governance structure. Third, Optima and AME will provide assistance in the hiring of consortium facilitators. Strong facilitators are critical to the success of any consortium. They will be accountable to the local consortium and supervised by Optima.

Finally, it is critical that AME consortia work closely with each AME Region in which they are located. Consortia are not meant to compete with AME Regions but to complement them. A typical consortium will only have 15 member companies. While hundreds of companies within an AME region may choose not to join a consortium, they will still rely on traditional AME Regional events to help support AME's mission "to inspire enterprise excellence by bringing people together to share, grow and learn." Consortia will also support the organization's key strategies to "connect people and organizations." The current AME Regional structure will not change and will actually be supported by at least one event sponsored annually by each consortium. Consortia events will be held to the same high standards for quality that members have come to expect from AME.

As target cities are identified, analyzed and prioritized in the next one to two years, individual AME members, AME Corporate members and AME Champions should expect to be contacted about hosting or attending local informational meetings about the Consortia Program. Those interested companies will be involved in the next stage of planning and implementation, including local membership guidelines, fee structures and programming. Each consortium will be supported by AME's financial systems, event registration and website. Individual member companies within a consortium will receive an AME Corporate membership, which includes discounts to conferences and events.

Our goal is to have about 50 consortia in operation in the next 10 years, ultimately creating an environment for AME to become the national umbrella organization for any consortium that chooses to participate. Additional

information and events will be planned for the AME Annual Conference in Chicago this October.

Keith Syberg is the AME vice president for Consortia.