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How diversity works: A look at four Michigan companies

Women in Business

Topics in this article: Automotive Workforce Crain's Michigan Business Lear Corp. Minorities International Automotive Components

Originally Published: November 03, 2013 8:00 AM Modified: November 14, 2013 7:29 PM

# International Automotive Components: 'Treat it like its own business unit'





Kenneth Gardner is manager of supplier diversity and business development at International Automotive Components. He also is chairman of the Rochester Hills-based Council of Supplier Diversity Professionals

International Automotive Components rose from the ashes of two distressed organizations. Billionaire investor Wilbur Ross assembled the deal, bringing together the interior systems division of Lear Corp. with the remains of Collins & Aikman Corp. to create the North American division of the global IAC group in 2007.

The Southfield-based company found itself in the position of being a global powerhouse with the ability to build its own corporate culture. The first goal: Create a strong diversity supplier initiative for the

## About IAC

What it does: Vehicle interiors supplier with clients such as BMW AG, Chrysler Group LLC, Ford Motor Co. and General Motors Co.

Founded: 2007 (North American division)

Employees: 18,000 in North America

Annual sales: \$2.5 billion in North America

Headquarters: Southfield

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Diversity supplier program initiated: 2007

U.S.

Leading that initiative is Kenneth Gardner, who came from Dana Corp., where he learned the value of the supply chain the hard way.

"Dana lost a quality award because we didn't have a supplier diversity program in place that demonstrated to a customer that we thought like they thought, that we wanted to do everything that we could possibly do to be a

IAC over the hump in obtaining new business as well keeping our existing customers."

part of their culture," said Gardner, who also chairs the Rochester Hills-based Council of Supplier Diversity Professionals. "So they made me the director of minority business development so that wouldn't happen again

His next challenge: Oversee diversity in a company that has filed for a \$115 million initial public offering.

Crain's asked Gardner about IAC's diversity initiatives.

#### What is the business case for having diversity in your supply chain?

It's about giving IAC the ability to use every supplier, the best suppliers. We take the supply chain seriously bec our lifeblood.

#### What was the impetus for creating these programs?

We had initiatives from our customers, whom we cherished very much, surrounding quality, on-time delivery an supplier diversity. The expectation was there from them, so we knew we needed a supplier diversity initiative fc company

#### How do you connect with diverse suppliers?

We have a very strong bench of potential suppliers in Michigan because of the effort the automotive OEMs hav the past. One of the immediate things we did with them was to go out and find different community-based grou| the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Michigan Minority Supplier Development Council, which ho ethnic minorities. We also joined the National Women's Business Council. We treat these councils as custor part of my job is to go to these councils and search for diverse suppliers that have the right footprint.

## How do you discuss the case for diversity internally?

We basically tell them for IAC to continue doing business, we have to do a couple of things better than anybody quality, on-time delivery and supplier diversity. Having a strong and diverse supply chain is the decision that ge over the hump in obtaining new business as well as keeping our existing customers.

# How do you measure the success of IAC's diversity supplier program?

Our president and CEO (James Kamsickas) doesn't want it to be about numbers; he wanted the intent of the pi be the focus. Our intent is to make sure that we do business with as many diverse suppliers as we can. We do: it by trying to do as many dollars as we can. You can have one diverse supplier and do a billion dollars of busir that's not the best thing for the community.

#### What advice do you have for other companies implementing supplier diversity programs?

You have to have a dedicated process for supplier diversity. You have to treat it like its own business unit. Sup diversity, it should touch every operation, every functional part. We educate all employees on the value of diver

### What trends do you see in supplier diversity?

If you think about it, we're talking about underutilized groups in the United States. Many companies already rec gays and lesbians as being such a group that has been underutilized. Many companies, they recognize veterar underutilized. I think you'll see a more concentrated effort in accepting those types of groups.

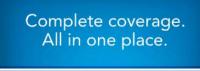
**DETERMINATION** Why diversity matters for the company: "Having a That's what centennial strong and diverse supply chain is the decision that g

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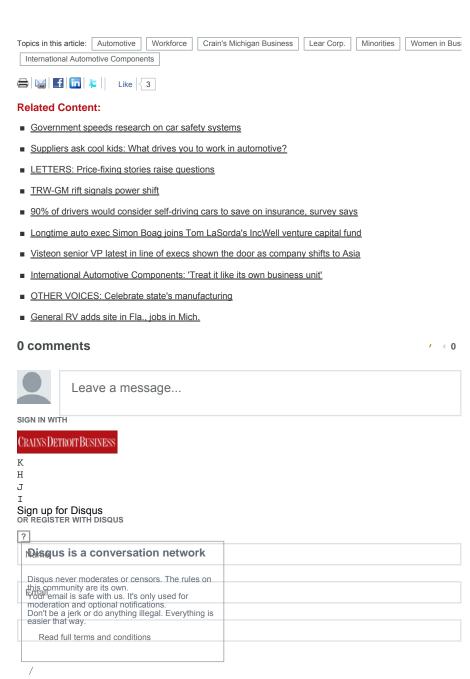




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