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Lubrizon Accelerator Program a thing of beauty to some brands

Initiative helps companies develop new products, business models

BY KAREN FARKAS

When Curan Mehra wanted to develop a concentrated hand soap pod that would dissolve in water and dispense as a foam, he contacted the Lubrizon Corp., best known for creating specialty chemicals for transportation and industry.

He and his father, Sanjiv, the CEO of EOS Products, a multinational skin care company, wanted to work with the 92-year-old, Wickliffe-based company's new accelerator program, which helps startup beauty brands develop and manufacture new products.

While the Mehras had access to their own chemists and had never worked with Lubrizon, they felt the accelerator provided an advantage. Not only could Lubrizon's chemists help create a formulation for the pod, but the company also provided testing and other resources to help bring a sustainable, new product to market.

"The team was very enthusiastic about the product," Sanjiv Mehra said.

Brandon Ford, chief accelerator officer for Lubrizon Life Science, said he and his team, based around the world, were excited to tackle the pod proposal.

"They had some initial formulation ideas and came to us because one of the areas we have strong expertise in, which may sound strange or funny, is how to create foam," he said. "Another expertise is how to thicken things."



Six months later, at the end of April, Gelo hand soap hit the market.

The eco-friendly product with a reusable dispenser is manufactured, marketed and sold by Curan Mehra's firm, Hayden Products. Since the dissolvable pod is attractive to consumers and the product arrived on store shelves during the COVID-19 pandemic, Gelo is on track for more than \$10 million in sales this year, the Mehras said.

Gelo is just one of about 100 product success stories for the Lubrizon Accelerator Program, which launched in 2017 in the

company's Life Science division, which works on beauty, health and home products. It was an innovative move for an established company, Ford said.

"Trying to do something new in a 90-year-old company can be challenging," he said. "The fact that we are flourishing inside Lubrizon as a kind of startup is a testament to the culture being fostered here."

The accelerator was created after company officials identified an unmet need in the beauty market, he said.

"Everything is happening so rapidly in the

industry that independent brands have started to come into the market and were driven by lower barriers of entry — they didn't have to manufacture tens of thousands of units or spend tens of thousands to build a website," Ford said. "They were bringing real creative ideas that larger brands couldn't keep up with and the huge disruption in the beauty industry was an opportunity for us."

The initial goal of the accelerator, which was promoted at trade shows and to company customers, was to help beauty brands develop and manufacture new products. In 2019, it expanded to explore and develop new business models and identify new external partners.

Lubrizon also provides technical and regulatory support and can conduct surveys and create focus groups to validate ideas, Ford said.

"One of the biggest things in the beauty space is people are not convinced about the efficacy of the product," he said.

Lubrizon's clinical testing lab recruits volunteers to try products and provide feedback.

Lubrizon's only benefit from the program is the ongoing sale of its ingredients to the product's manufacturer, Ford said. Sanjiv Mehra said Hayden Products is buying large quantities of chemicals every month from Lubrizon.

But Lubrizon is open to opportunities. In 2018, the company invested in One Ocean Beauty, a marine-based skincare line, which it helped develop, Ford said. Lubrizon sold its equity to a venture capital fund in August.

"We look at unique opportunities like that, and while it is not a core part of our strategy, it is something that we evaluate," he said. "We don't necessarily see our-



Brandon Ford, chief accelerator director for Lubrizon Life Science, is uniquely qualified to lead the accelerator program. "I call myself the chief troublemaker because I am always rustling feathers and challenging the status," he said. "Lubrizon doesn't mind and knows that I am here to push the envelope."

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selves as beauty brand owners. We really want to engage the beauty community and help them grow."

The five primary members of Ford's team are located at Lubrizon facilities in Barcelona, Shanghai, Montreal and Frankfurt. They work closely with five formulation chemists in Barcelona.

And Ford is uniquely qualified to lead the effort. He earned a nursing degree then later earned a law degree and an MBA. After a few years at an Akron law firm, he began working at Lubrizon in 2007 as legal counsel to its business development team in the Life Science division.

In 2012, while at the company, he founded and ran Vintage TeaWorks, selling loose tea blends inspired by wine. That company closed in 2018.

He said in 2014 he wanted to learn more about Lubrizon and moved into sales in the Life Science division.

"It was a great way to learn, and in four years I was thinking about what to do next and decided to take everything I had learned as an entrepreneur, lawyer, in sales and as a nurse and blend it all together," he said. "The accelerator opportunity presented itself and was a way to flex all those different muscles and make an impact."

The success of the accelerator is leading to the addition of more team members and an expansion to the home care division, which includes laundry and surface cleaners, Ford said.

"I call myself the chief troublemaker because I am always rustling feathers and challenging the status," he said. "Lubrizon doesn't mind and knows that I am here to push the envelope. I am having the time of my life."

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