

Milwaukee businesses seeking startup proposals for industry challenges

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— Milwaukee-area businesses are seeking innovative proposals to solve a wide array of industry challenges such as improving health literacy, maintaining company culture with a remote workforce, automating product identification and more.

Company representatives described the problems they need solutions for during the fourth annual Reverse Pitch Milwaukee event, held yesterday as part of Milwaukee Tech Week. The competition gives entrepreneurs a pathway for growing a startup aimed at providing these specific solutions.

“We recognize that we have some really critical business needs that don’t necessarily make sense for us to develop ourselves,” said Gwenn Peters, innovation leader at Rockwell Automation. “Investing in the development and maintenance of that internally would be really slower and more expensive than if we were to partner with a startup company to do that.”

One of the challenges posed by Rockwell Automation and Plymouth-based Sargento Foods relates to using raw material data to optimize certain manufacturing processes. The companies are asking for proposals on ways to combine operator knowledge with “historical and real-time raw material attributes” in order to better predict performance and improve machine operations.

Rockwell is also seeking a solution for quickly identifying products being used in the field for upgrade and replacement to improve sales and avoid delays. Peters said current identification tools miss out on thousands of queries each year by failing to determine an equivalent product to a competitor part.

“If a mere 10 percent of the failed queries were matched and converted to a push-button sale, it would generate \$4.5 million dollars,” she said, adding that most image recognition tools in the market are used for entertainment and other purposes. “The industrial space is largely untapped.”

Several of the business challenges presented were related to the insurance industry. Northwestern Mutual is looking for a startup to solve the challenge of tracking social media usage by employees and other affiliated individuals to avoid communication-related regulatory compliance issues. The company is also seeking a solution to ensure its workforce culture is preserved while some employees continue to work remotely.

Meanwhile, West Bend Mutual Insurance Company is looking for a solution that can analyze the risk of ordering property inspections for new clients based on a number of variables, digitize inspection reports and analyze collected data to improve future decision-making.

In order to improve engagement and access in the health care space, the Froedtert and Medical College of Wisconsin health system is looking for a solution to “proactively engage with individuals and communities” to build trust and health literacy.

Laura Dean, a patient education specialist at Froedtert Hospital, says solutions should find ways to understand how people learn about health and not rely on a “one-size-fits-all” model. She says that approach “would really empower people to

feel engaged in their health but also be an active member of their health care team.”

Entrepreneurs interested in tackling these challenges are first being asked to register for mentorship before Nov. 17, and application materials will be available by Nov. 24. Companies will select teams for pitching solution proposals by the first week of January and a “Pitch Back” event will be held in February. Selected startups will be announced in March.

See more on the competition here: <https://www.mketech.org/reverse-pitch-mke/>

-By Alex Moe