



# Continental Corporation Uses Idea Development Software\* to Encourage Collaboration and Communication Between Executives and R&D

## Company Overview

With annual revenues of \$35 billion, Continental Corporation is the second largest automotive industry supplier in Europe and one of the top five in the world. Its offerings include tire and brake technology, vehicle dynamics controls, and electronics and sensor systems. The company has been recognized as one of the leading innovators in its industry.

## The Business Challenge

Continental is a large, complex company and its R&D teams are distributed throughout the world. This decentralized structure was making it difficult for researchers and other stakeholders to collect and choose ideas to feed the front-end of Continental's product innovation process. The company concluded that it needed to establish a universal approach to managing ideation activity. This would encompass consistent methodologies and support for organizing, tracking and developing the most commercially promising concepts. A principal goal was to make the process transparent – particularly regarding why go / no go decisions were made by senior managers – so that employees would know that the ideas they submitted were given thoughtful consideration and, as a result, would feel encouraged to continue to contribute.

## The Solution

Continental did a thorough review of its existing idea management process, identifying ways

in which that process could be made more effective and efficient. As a result, the company made a variety of improvements, including standardization of how it ranked proposed ideas, the establishment of timelines for feedback on submitted ideas, and deployment of a procedure for alerting idea contributors as to the status of their submissions. These steps helped guide the company's design and development of a new idea management process. To complement the enhanced process, and help ensure its success, Continental chose to adopt an idea development software solution.

The new process and supporting software were made available initially to a select group of test users who were divided into three groups: idea contributors, innovation managers, and process designers. Test participants were given varying levels of access, depending upon their classification. Idea contributors were allowed to enter ideas for new products or services, discuss

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***– Michael Neuheisel  
Innovation Manager,  
Passenger and Light Truck Tire Division***

them online with their colleagues, and then submit them to their innovation managers for consideration. The managers classified incoming concepts and forwarded the most promising to the company's senior executives for scoring and prioritization. Ideas were sometimes sent to internal experts familiar with the proposed new products or services for further evaluation. Decisions regarding the future of each idea were recorded in the system for future reference.

### **The Results**

After three months of rigorous testing, the ideation process was rolled out to approximately 500 users worldwide within Continental's Passenger and Light Truck Tire division. Over 100 ideas per year are now managed by the system.

The software has helped Continental make the process markedly more transparent. Decisions on ideas are clearly tracked and documented in the system, making senior managers more publicly accountable for their conclusions. In turn, the company's R&D teams are more willing to submit ideas, and the quality of ideas presented for consideration has improved. According

to Michael Neuheisel, innovation manager for the division, "The introduction of [the software solution] has helped us to increase the transparency of our workflows and to assist our employees around the world in networking their ideas for new technology innovations."

In summary, Continental is using idea development software to:

- Streamline and systematize its idea submission process;
- Create greater process transparency and increase accountability for decisions made on proposed ideas; and
- Improve the quality of the ideas presented for consideration.

\*The solution referenced in this case study was provided by Hype Software, a Sopheon partner and leading provider of idea management software for product development. Sopheon has embedded the Hype software into its Idea Lab™ idea development offering, making it an integral component of Sopheon's Accolade® solution.



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