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# How do Oregon manufacturers stay relevant? This 111-year-old firm says R&D is the answer

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## RECOMMENDED

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Oregon manufacturing firms are no longer just in the business of making product. Today's organizations are continually challenged to transform the ways they supply the world with critical goods and services through more sustainable, efficient and innovative practices.

Rethinking your strategy is more relevant now with the rise of automation and the constant threat of commoditization, along with a pool of early career workers who value environmental sustainability in both word and deed.

Given the current landscape, how can Oregon manufacturers maintain their competitiveness and relevance? How do you keep your portfolio diverse and solve unknown customer problems? When was the last time you retooled your talent acquisition strategy to attract multigenerational workers?

As a mining technology provider, Weir is a global enterprise that has operated in Portland, Oregon, since 1913. Its ESCO division, which runs its headquarters office and steel foundry in Northwest Portland, is a leader in the development of ground engaging tools used in large infrastructure projects, mines and quarries.

Our purpose is made possible through long-term commitments with advanced materials, research and new product development in Portland. The key to staying relevant as an Oregon manufacturer is by recommitting to research and development, a culture of innovation and strategic partnerships.

### Build your R&D strategy to invest, innovate and improve

Solving your customer's toughest challenges depends on recruiting innovative thinkers and building a culture of experimentation. One way we encouraged this was by reshaping the role of our well-established Portland steel foundry.

In addition to creating safer, smarter, more sustainable products in the plant, the company has invested in a development center, metallurgical lab and the nearby Hank Swigert Center for Innovation. These Portland-based facilities provide testing grounds for employees to create, build and break products, while fostering a culture of safety, innovation and continuous improvement.

This has enabled the foundry's c.100 workers, metallurgists and engineers to support a range of global, internal customers seeking world-class metallurgy and materials science. To that end, devoting more dollars to the effort can yield tangible results, such as new product development, higher quality output and productivity.



### Explore complementary partnerships to bolster your efforts

Tapping into local partnerships that are complementary to your research endeavors can work to your advantage. Weir has been rooted in the community for more than a century and makes it a priority to remain actively engaged with partners across industry and academia.

The Oregon Metals Initiative, formed by Weir and other peers, provides natural alignment for companies to partner with research universities and leverage state dollars for cutting-edge projects. ESCO Division Chief Metallurgist Daniel Widlund calls this a "symbiosis" of government, industry and educational institutions working together to encourage collaboration across the state's metals industry.

In Weir's case, forming strategic alignment with well-matched educational firms, including Portland State University and Oregon State University, creates access to early career talent and builds awareness of opportunities to earn and learn locally.

### Build on the legacy of past generations to drive new advancements in technology

In the U.S., the manufacturing industry struggles with filling new positions, while 5% of the existing workforce is already past retirement age. The call to action is clear: Fully leverage your current workforce, especially with longer-tenured workers with significant industry knowledge.

Weir uses the knowledge and technologies developed by previous generations as a foundation to create new solutions and advancements. Current veterans like Robin Churchill, with 43 years of expertise in advanced materials, make it possible for research and development efforts in Oregon to benefit Weir's global customer base. At the same time, we cultivate and attract early and mid-career professionals through internships and immersive events that inspire the next generation of workers.

Additionally, the U.S. Employment Department report estimates there will be 12,600 more manufacturing jobs by 2027. Organizations will be required to rethink traditional STEM skills to support this growth. Weir has implemented referral bonus programs and mentorship initiatives and recently recommitted to Portland as an attractive place to live and work.

Organizations that effectively build on the legacy of those who came before can ensure they continue to thrive, while providing abundant opportunities to meet current and future needs and improve the bottom line.

The belief that traditional industries, such as manufacturing and mining, are old tech is simply outdated. For Oregon companies to meet their organizational objectives and remain relevant, they must build research and development into their long-term strategy, put more research dollars to the effort and explore strategic partnerships to support demand.

*The Weir Group is a leading engineering company with 12,000 employees worldwide. Its ESCO division employs 400 Oregon workers who design, manufacture and service mining and infrastructure equipment. ESCO shares an unrelenting focus on product innovation to create reliable, long-lasting wear parts and solutions developed from superior metallurgy and manufacturing.*

*Dan Kearsley is vice president of global operations for the division's foundry and fabrication sites. He is responsible for overseeing the manufacturing of ESCO's range of ground engaging tools through safer, smarter and more sustainable operational practices.*

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