

EMS leads by example in advanced manufacturing

QUEENSLAND is home to one of the world's most advanced microwave radio and satellite communications manufacturers – EM Solutions – and there are other world-leading manufacturers in that ecosystem.

Yet, laments EM Solutions managing director and CEO, Rowan Gilmore, there remains a public perception that advanced manufacturing is dying in Australia – a myth he wants to dispel. Instead, Dr Gilmore wants to get the news out about certain advantages and challenges in the local manufacturing environment that have led to EM Solutions success, to encourage others.

“Did you know that one of Australia's eight new national Science and Research Priorities is *‘high value and innovative manufacturing?’*” Dr Gilmore asked. He said it was important to set such priorities to assist growth in the manufacturing sector.

“According to the Commonwealth Science Council, ‘setting priorities and aligning a proportion of Australia's research investment to them will help us

build critical mass and scale in areas vital to our future’,” he said.

“Can Australia ever succeed at advanced manufacturing? As an exemplar, Queensland company EM Solutions (EMS) would respond with a cautious ‘yes’.

“EMS has designed and manufactured in Brisbane the world's fastest microwave radios (used to connect the Nasdaq and New York exchanges at fibre-like speeds) and is supplying maritime broadband satellite terminals for disaster recovery to technological leaders such as Japan, but the manufacturing path has proven far more difficult than any of the company's founders could possibly have imagined.

“There have been numerous contributors to success. One has been the judicious use of overseas supply chains where appropriate, to take advantage of lower cost materials and labour and to undertake initial product assembly,” Dr Gilmore said.

“Another has been ongoing collaboration with research organisa-

tions such as UQ and CSIRO. A third has been exposure to global markets, where the incessant pressures of both demand and competition have kept alive the hunger to do better. Finally, a lower Australian dollar has undoubtedly improved competitiveness of our pricing in global markets.”

However, Dr Gilmore said the major disappointment has been selling within Australia.

“Too many potential Australian buyers prefer to procure advanced manufactured product from offshore suppliers,” Dr Gilmore said. “Until our very own procurement people are prepared to innovate, no amount of research in advanced manufacturing will yield Queensland or Australia a good return on its investment.”

EM Solutions is a Queensland Leaders Alumni Member.

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Rowan Gilmore.