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2010-07-09: International calling card

Jason Kornwitz
Northeastern University

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International calling card



Northeastern senior Neil Hannah, center, poses with his colleagues in front of one of the set-up carts that he designed on his co-op for Eastek International, in China.

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Northeastern senior Neil Hannah says his co-op at a plastics and electronics factory in Fenggang, China, gave him a “foot in the door” with prospective full-time employers all over the world.

“Working in China for six months is invaluable in this job market,” says Hannah, a **mechanical engineering** major who completed his third experiential learning opportunity with Eastek International in June.

“Almost all manufacturing takes place in China, Korea and Japan, and I’ve already shown an ability to succeed there,” he says, noting that the growth of industry in Asia has convinced him to pursue a career at a technology-based start-up in China. “They’re building,

and building and building, and more and more is going to go on there.”

At Eastek, Hannah increased the operational efficiency of its injection molding machines—devices that manufacture plastic products such as iPod cases, routers and medical supplies—by decreasing the changeover time between running one product to the next.

After watching video of the old routine, he got to work, making the most out of every movement on the factory floor. He built a cart for tools that factory workers used on the machine, and stored it close by. He substituted quick connects for screws and tubes that attach to the equipment. He economized the process of taking out and returning molds.

By the end of the co-op, Hannah had reduced the time consumed by the process from 45 minutes to 35 minutes. He saved the factory 10 to 16 hours per week, making it financially feasible to manufacture special orders and increasing the chances of on-time delivery.

And although he occasionally found himself longing for a slice of pizza, Hannah says he wouldn’t trade the experience for anything.

He motorcycled through Vietnam during the Chinese New Year, learned enough of the language to order food, buy supplies for work and give taxi drivers directions and got a hands-on look at Chinese manufacturing.

“The last six months have been awesome,” he says.

For more information, please contact Jason Kornwitz at 617-373-5729 or at j.kornwitz@neu.edu.

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