

# What is Specialty Chemical Manufacturing?

## Ask the Expert



**Kate Donahue, President, Hampford Research, Inc. (HRI)**

Kate Donahue is president of [Hampford Research, Inc. \(HRI\)](#), a family owned, custom chemical manufacturing firm specializing in hi-purity specialty chemicals used in the electronics, dental, cosmetics, engineered materials and printing/lithography industries and located in Stratford, CT. Donahue also serves on SOCMA's Board of Governors and is a recent recipient of the Connecticut Technology Council's 2013 Small Business Innovation & Leadership Award. Donahue was among 53 finalists and was selected based on her professional experience, innovation, creativity and demonstration of leadership. Here, she shares her insights on the industry and why she finds her job so rewarding.

## Q&A

- **How or why did you become involved in the specialty chemical industry and how long have you been a part of the industry?** *HRI was originally started 30 years ago by my father, Jack Hampford, who identified a need in the industry for chemical suppliers to partner with their customers and work jointly with them beginning with concept design, through laboratory and pilot scale-up, to full production. I took over the company six years ago after having served on the Board of Directors for 10 years.*
- **What do you think are the most pressing challenges facing the specialty chemical industry and what solutions do you recommend for addressing them?** *In addition to all the normal challenges faced by small business, there are others that are specific to our industry. These include the protection of our (and our customers) intellectual property, competition from emerging markets, as well as the stigma that sometimes can be associated with a chemical company. With the help of advocates like SOCMA, we can work to level the global playing field, including creating stronger international IP protections, as well as showing that chemistry is an integral part of our day-to-day life and that chemical companies like HRI are conscientious citizens of the world.*
- **Do you think there should be common goals within the industry? If so, what would those goals be?** *To remain competitive and profitable while faced with the threats from emerging markets. To maintain a diverse portfolio to insure viability in difficult economic times. To be environmentally aware and to support common-sense environmental regulations.*
- **Please share a couple of personal or professional strategies you intend to pursue in 2013.** *HRI plans to grow our market share, break into new markets through research, marketing and strategic partnerships with our customers and continue to be a good corporate citizen in our community, state and country.*
- **What are some of the major changes you have seen in the industry since you became a part of it?** *Our customer base has become more global, and we are experiencing more global competition. Technology continues to advance, causing us to grow along with it, and environmental legislation continues to have a strong influence on how we do business. The value proposition that we, and our customers, offer isn't simply the chemical in the drum, rather the "know how" that goes along with it. The protection of this intellectual property is critical to our continued success. It is because of this core belief, we are able to build true partnerships with our customers, having open dialog, resulting in our mutual benefit.*
- **What advice would you give a young person thinking about going into the specialty chemical industry?** *Specialty chemicals continue to be an important and vibrant part of our global economy, filled with new opportunities and challenges. As the leader of a chemical manufacturing company who is not a chemist or a chemical engineer, I would argue that this industry offers unique career opportunities for intelligent, creative individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Chemistry touches every part of our lives – from smartphones to make-up to automotive paint – and being part of the industry that creates these materials is both exciting and rewarding.*