

Execute Flawlessly, Or Competitors Will

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Greg Galvin, PH.D. founded Ithaca, NY-based [Kionix](#) [1] in 1993 to commercialize a novel micromechanical technology pioneered by researchers at Cornell University. From 1993 to 2000, Kionix went from its two founding fathers to a 40-person operation that developed products in inertial sensors, microfluidics, data storage, micro-relays and micro-optics.

In late 2000, Kionix was acquired by San Jose, CA-based Calient Networks (CN) for its optical switching technology and renamed [Calient Optical Components](#) [2] (COC). Just prior to the CN acquisition, a new company was spun off to pursue the inertial sensor, microfluidics and data storage markets. Fittingly, the new company reclaimed the Kionix name after the acquisition.

Up until June 2002, Galvin served as President and CEO of COC, and also held positions on the Calient Networks and new Kionix boards. It was in July 2002 that he returned full time to Kionix as President and CEO, and advanced the company to its nearly \$250-million acquisition in 2009 as a wholly-owned Rohm (Japan) subsidiary.

In addition to continuing service at Kionix's helm, Galvin also serves as Chairman of [Rheonix](#) [3], a corporate entity established in December 2008 to commercialize a unique polymer chip microfluidic technology developed by Kionix scientists. In June 2009, Galvin received the [Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year 2010 Award](#) [4], which recognizes "outstanding entrepreneurs who are building and leading dynamic, growing businesses."

In the latest [PD&D Fireside Chat](#) [5], Galvin discusses his entrepreneurial spirit, getting fired, the future for MEMS inertial-sensor manufacturers, language barriers as a Japanese subsidiary, and his need to execute near flawlessly.

PD&D: How does it feel to be the Entrepreneur of the Year?

Greg Galvin: It's a great feeling. Certainly, one appreciates being recognized for what Kionix has accomplished over the years. A tremendous amount of work goes into an entrepreneurial effort, and the acknowledgment is immensely satisfying.

PD&D: You said, "It takes more than one entrepreneur to build a thriving, successful company." So in your opinion, how many does it take? Can you ever have too many?

Galvin: Typically, no one person has the skills and vision to drive all aspects of a business. Some are strong at sales and marketing, some at engineering, some at operations, and so forth. A successful company requires great execution on all these critical fronts.

Hence, you need strong entrepreneurial players in as many key positions as your company and marketplace require. Any more beyond those key two to four players would be too many as there can only be one leader in each.

PD&D: How did you get your start in the business?

Galvin: Mostly by getting fired from every other job I've had, all two of them. Like many entrepreneurial efforts, Kionix came about more by chance than by plan.

My interests have always been on the business side of science and technology. Cornell researchers had invented a novel technology that looked like it had potential in the marketplace.

I decided to give it a chance and build a company around the technology. I now tell students the top ten ways not to start a company; we did all ten.

PD&D: What was the most interesting project to come across your desk?

Galvin: The most interesting project, which led to the first sale of Kionix, was an array of micromirrors for optical switching.

This was an area in which the company was not involved at the time. We had to learn a whole new application area, design an amazingly complex electromechanical device, and do so on a very short timeframe.

It was really fun to see our first, albeit crude, prototype functioning in a switch at a tradeshow about six months after we started the project.

PD&D: What does the future hold for MEMS inertial-sensor manufacturers?

Galvin: Continued rapid growth. We are fortunate to be in a marketplace that is still in the early stages of its growth.

Three years ago almost no cell phone had an accelerometer in it. This year probably 30 to 40 percent of all cell phones — out of a billion-plus unit market — will have an accelerometer.

Some phones have an accelerometer/magnetometer combination for navigation. Some have a gyroscope as well. Throughout all our markets we are seeing increasing adoption of inertial sensors, combinations of inertial and other sensors, and more applications taking advantage of the information provided by these sensors.

PD&D: What were some of the “significant challenges” that you faced in your time at Kionix?

Galvin: The list of challenges is long, but the one that stands out above all others is investment capital. It was, and unfortunately still is, extremely difficult to raise investment capital in Central New York.

In spite of the fact that this region is in the top two or three in terms of total Federal research funding, we consistently rank near dead last in terms of total venture capital investment in the country.

This fact is actually why I am most pleased with winning the Ernst & Young award. I really hope the broader national recognition will help open people’s eyes to the investment opportunities in Central New York and will encourage others to pursue entrepreneurial ventures in this region.

PD&D: What are the challenges in being a New York-based subsidiary to a Japan-based company?

Galvin: So far, so good. The only challenge we’ve found in working with our parent is language skills. Rohm is weak in English outside of the senior management, and Kionix is even weaker in Japanese.

Our business is global, with a heavy concentration in Asia. I travel nearly every other week, most of the time somewhere in Asia. Culturally, we are very used to dealing with Japanese and other Asian countries, so I don’t think being a subsidiary of a Japanese company is anything all that strange to Kionix.

PD&D: Of the many trade shows held each year, what is the one you can’t miss?

Galvin: Trade shows are a frequently debated topic within the company. We have not been big on trade shows in the past, although we are going to more of them as

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we've grown.

From a pure sensor product standpoint, the "must be at" show is [Sensors Expo](#) [6] held in Chicago each year. However, we are tending more towards trade shows specific to our markets, such as [CES](#) [7] for consumer electronics, [CTIA](#) [8] for cell phones or E3 for computer gaming, rather than sensor-focused trade shows.

PD&D: What would you say is your company's bread and butter?

Galvin: Our bread and butter product is a three-axis, low-g accelerometer.

These devices are used in all sorts of consumer electronic products, including cell phones, game controllers, hard disk drives, navigation systems, watches, and on and on.

The accelerometer allows the consumer electronic product to be aware of motion and position, enabling more functional user interfaces.

PD&D: Where do you see Kionix in five years?

Galvin: I see continued strong growth for Kionix. In five years, we will offer a much broader product line than we do today. Our products will offer very complex algorithms that deliver great intelligence to the end applications using those products.

We will be much more integrated with our parent company, [Rohm](#) [9], allowing us to take advantage of the vast resources within Rohm to further our products and markets.

PD&D: What keeps you up at night?

Galvin: Competition. We live in a very dynamic marketplace with continual new product introductions, rather short product life cycles, and several very capable competitors.

Every day is a fight to retain an account or to win a new one. It places strain on the entire organization from designing the next product on time, to meeting highly-variable customer shipments, to reducing the cost to meet market demands.

If we don't execute almost flawlessly, one of our competitors will, and they will take business from us.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.kionix.com/>

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[2] <http://www.calient.com/index.php>

[3] <http://www.rheonix.com/>

[4] <http://www.pddnet.com/news-kionix-president-and-ceo-greg-galvin-named-ernst-and-young-entrepreneur-of-the-year-2010-062910/>

[5] <http://www.pddnet.com/news-we-are-on-fire-right-now-a-pdd-electronic-fireside-chat-with-james-heppelmann-ptc-new-ceo-051010/>

[6] <http://www.sensorexpo.com/>

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