

MKE Tech Hub Coalition Launches Synapse to Transform Milwaukee's Manufacturing Future

The MKE Tech Hub Coalition has announced the launch of **Synapse**, a strategic initiative designed to ensure Milwaukee's mid-market manufacturers benefit from the rapid evolution of industrial technology while simultaneously strengthening the region's position as an emerging tech hub. As global manufacturing accelerates toward Industry 5.0, Synapse expands regional capacity to help small and medium-sized manufacturers evaluate, adopt, and benefit from artificial intelligence while creating new opportunities for technology talent, innovation, and economic diversification.

"While large manufacturers are rapidly adopting emerging technologies, our region's mid-market manufacturers often lack access to the support needed to keep pace with technological change," says Kathy Henrich, CEO of MKE Tech Hub Coalition. "Synapse delivers a shared network of resources to help these vital businesses confidently evaluate and implement AI solutions that drive real business value, while simultaneously creating a vibrant marketplace for local tech talent and solution providers."

Synapse will develop a carefully curated network of industry veterans, educational institutions, and technology partners to provide manufacturers with comprehensive support across their AI journey. This integrated approach includes strategic advisory services, executive education, proof of value implementations, and peer learning networks that leverage the experience of successful manufacturing executives in the region. By connecting manufacturers with technology expertise, Synapse creates new pathways for tech talent to engage with the region's traditional industrial strengths.

"What makes Synapse unique is our collaborative network focused on delivering business value through practical AI adoption," adds Sanjay Mohan, Executive Director of AI Strategy at MKE Tech Hub Coalition. "We're not promoting technology for technology's sake. Instead, we help manufacturing leaders identify their most pressing business challenges and determine where AI can deliver measurable improvements in efficiency, quality, and competitiveness. This approach dramatically reduces implementation risk while accelerating time to value for manufacturers and creating sustainable demand for the region's growing tech sector."

Success will be measured across four key dimensions: business outcomes from technology adoption, improved organizational capabilities, community impact, and regional economic growth. This comprehensive approach ensures that Synapse's work translates into tangible benefits for manufacturers, technology workers, entrepreneurs, and the broader Milwaukee economy.

Synapse builds on the success of the AI Manufacturing Workshops, which were launched in the second half of 2024. Those workshops and our independent research identified over 32 top use cases for AI in manufacturing, which help improve labor productivity, from AI-augmented quoting to quality inspection. Now, Synapse is designed to help those manufacturers take the first steps, creating a pipeline of opportunities for technology professionals and service providers across the region.

A unique aspect of Synapse is its delivery model, which brings together verified partners with deep expertise in manufacturing, technology, and business transformation. This model ensures manufacturers have access to best-in-class capabilities while maintaining the convenience of a single, coordinated point of contact. For technology firms and professionals, it creates a structured marketplace where their expertise can be matched with qualified manufacturing needs.

Through its peer learning networks, Synapse creates structured opportunities for manufacturing leaders to share experiences and insights, fostering a collaborative approach to innovation that strengthens both the manufacturing and technology ecosystems. This knowledge-sharing accelerates learning, helps companies avoid common pitfalls, and creates connections between Milwaukee's industrial heritage and its technology future.

The initiative has already attracted several notable partners, including technology consultancies, educational institutions, and advisory firms that recognize Milwaukee's potential to lead in practical AI adoption. These partnerships strengthen the region's capacity to support manufacturing innovation while creating new opportunities for workforce development, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. By stimulating demand for advanced technology solutions, Synapse helps create the critical mass of technology activity needed to establish Milwaukee as a recognized tech hub.

While Synapse initially focuses on manufacturing, the MKE Tech Hub Coalition plans to expand the initiative to other key regional industries as it demonstrates success and builds proof points. "Our strategy is to begin with manufacturing, where we have deep regional expertise and clear AI use cases," explains Henrich. "As we deliver measurable business outcomes in manufacturing, we'll apply the same collaborative

approach to other sectors vital to our regional economy, creating a broader base of technology adoption that further strengthens Milwaukee's position as a growing tech hub."

Synapse represents a crucial step in ensuring Milwaukee's manufacturing sector remains competitive in an increasingly technology-driven global economy while simultaneously building the region's reputation as a center for practical technology innovation. By focusing first on practical AI adoption in mid-market manufacturing and then expanding to other industries, the initiative builds on the region's industrial strengths while positioning it for future growth in the evolution toward Industry 5.0 and establishing Milwaukee as a model for how traditional industrial centers can successfully transition to technology-driven economies.

Q&A Document

1. Why focus on small and medium sized manufacturing?

Manufacturing makes up 20% of Wisconsin's economy. And, almost 50% of manufacturing employment is in [small and medium sized manufacturing organizations](#). Over 70% of these manufacturers consider automation an important priority according to the [WCMP's 2024-25 Wisconsin Manufacturing Report](#). This push towards automation will continue to grow as Wisconsin's population ages, enabling continued economic growth by increasing productivity per employee

2. We have several organizations in Wisconsin targeted to help manufacturers, how does Synapse fit within the ecosystem?

Synapse's approach is to create a network of resources to ensure that manufacturers are directed to the right resources. Wisconsin Center for Manufacturing Productivity (WCMP) is an excellent resource to help manufacturers evaluate opportunities for efficiency. Synapse can then provide access to deeper expertise on AI. Organizations like the Connected Systems Institute and Microsoft's Co-Innovation Center also provide excellent resources to help organizations develop specific solutions, once the business case has been built. Regardless of how a manufacturer engages, we have built collaborative partnerships to help serve them with the right expertise.

3. What Partners have been engaged to date?

MKE Tech has assembled a network of educational institutions, consulting firms, independent strategic advisors with long-standing executive presence

in tech and regional economic development initiatives. Today, you'll see concurrent press releases from 100Joules, Concurrency, Ensylon, and Midpoint.. As we formalize our other partnerships, you will see joint press statements from other organizations as well who are keen to help our manufacturers be more innovative and competitive.