Understanding why the Nano One JDA with Umicore is significant in the battery materials world

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Unfortunately, a publicly traded company can't do much about the timing of news as they are required to disclose material information pretty much immediately. When you put out a press release on December 21st, when everyone is seemingly obsessed with holiday travel issues and winter storm warnings, it can potentially fly under the radar of investors. Pile on a market that was visited by the Grinch for all but one day in the last two weeks (ironically the best day in that period for the S&P 500 was Dec 21) and you can see how there is the potential for a very meaningful piece of news to appear to get lost in the shuffle.

I'm referring to recent news from Nano One Materials Corp. (TSX: NANO) that stated it had entered into a Joint Development Agreement (JDA) for production process technologies for cathode active materials (CAM) for lithium-ion batteries with Umicore.

This is a really big deal for Nano One, but before I explore why that's the case let's look at why I think the market appears to have either missed it or ignored it. Sure the stock rallied almost 8% the day the news came out, but as I noted above, it was a good day for the market overall and many stocks saw substantial gains that day. In the case of Nano One, the volume traded that day was not out of the ordinary, and the share price has subsequently sold off to below where it was trading when this news first came out. More telling (at least to me), is that

there isn't a noticeably above average trading volume day since this news. Yes, overall market volume has been below average for the last few days, but if a company puts out material news, somebody will take notice, and it appears (based on trading volume) no one has.

At this point, you might be thinking I'm the one missing the point and perhaps the news isn't as big a deal as I'm making it out to be. I can live with that but I'll let you be the judge as I flesh out what this could mean for Nano One.

Let's start with who the JDA was signed with – Umicore. Belgium-based Umicore SA is a significant player in the battery materials world, with revenues of €2.1 billion (turnover of €13.8 billion) in the first half of 2022 and currently employs 11,350 people. It is a leading circular materials technology company with an extensive expertise in the fields of material science, chemistry, and metallurgy. Umicore is the largest producer of cathode material outside of Asia, and they are far and away the Western world's largest recycler of technology metals. They are a dominant player in LCO batteries and nickel rich cathode materials. Canadian readers may recall the July 13th announcement of plans to build a C$1.5 billion battery supply chain plant near Kingston, Ontario. Additionally, Umicore has a joint venture with Volkswagen AG to build precursor and cathode material production capacities in Europe to supply Volkswagen AG's European battery cell production.

And what could all this mean for Nano One? If the JDA is successful in increasing throughput for high nickel NMC cathode active materials while reducing costs and environmental footprint, we could see Umicore making their cathode materials using Nano One's patented M2CAM® One-Pot process technology. Now you can see why it's important to understand who Umicore is and what they've got going on. This could be huge for Nano One,

albeit both the Kingston facility and the Volkswagen joint venture aren’t slated to be in production until 2025.

Nevertheless, Nano One is on a roll and continues to make material progress. When I last discussed Nano One in August, I commented on how years of hard work was starting to come together and that momentum was starting to snowball. At the time they had recently acquired 100% of the shares of Johnson Matthey Battery Materials Ltd. located in Candiac, Québec, signing a joint development agreement for lithium-ion battery materials with industry giant BASF, and announced a US$10 million equity investment by one of the world’s largest mining companies, Rio Tinto. This latest deal with Umicore brings further credibility to Nano One and signals that this well funded (almost C$46 million in working capital), C$235 million market company appears to be headed in the right direction.