
STOP

Intellectual Property™
Marketing Advisor

The monthly guide to achieving maximum commercial success for innovations

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IP communications: Don't shy away from telling your story

While communications strategies are widely recognized by TTOs as an important foundation for their marketing campaigns, some executives may not be conveying all of the benefits their IP assets have to offer, asserts **Bruce Berman**, CEO of Brody Berman Associates. "IP communications is basically good business policy," says Berman. "Until very recently it was thought that for IP-related information, and patents in particular, the strategy should be to fly under the radar -- to just secure the assets and quietly put them in a file drawer."

However, he notes, if you don't communicate proactively about your portfolio, it's difficult for your audiences to interpret what your patents *really* mean. "One university may have 86 patents, while another has 225 -- is that better? An investment manager with a large number of stocks in his portfolio is not necessarily any smarter; it's really about quality and performance," he suggests. "Patent counts do not reveal enough, nor do numbers of licenses -- it's what they *mean in terms of*

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U of Missouri matches marketing specialists with IP spaces

The University of Missouri system is enhancing its IP marketing efforts with the hiring of what it hopes will be the first of several marketing specialists dedicated to specific groups of technology spaces. **Anthony Harris** was hired on July 1 to provide marketing services for medical devices and technologies developed on the system's four campuses. The system office also hopes to add marketing professionals in the life science and engineering fields in support of its TTOs.

"This is a new approach for us," says **Scott Uhlmann**, director in the Office of Intellectual Property Administration. "Some campuses have utilized graduate research assistants to provide help in marketing or IP analysis, but now we are hiring a dedicated full-time position at the system level."

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U of Illinois benchmarks its way to improvement of IP marketing

Recognizing a disconnect between the strength of its IP and the results of commercialization efforts, the TTO at the University of Illinois-Urbana is using benchmarking and comparisons of best practices at other tech transfer offices to enhance its marketing and get more licenses signed.

"We're pretty good at getting inventions into the office; our professors trust us, and we have a strong patent portfolio," says **Steven L. Willie,** assistant director in the Office of Technology Management. "Now, it's a matter of improving our processes for getting them to the outside world so they make money." Willie concedes that in the past some marketing strategies have been done on a 'hodge-podge' basis. "We're making them more robust, and more efficient; it's a natural business progression," he explains.

"This was not so much a decision as an evolution," he continues. "It makes sense to put a more businesslike effort into marketing."

That includes learning from others -- both inside and outside the University of Illinois system. "We have a sister office in Chicago which also markets their technology, and as they aligned more closely with us we saw that the ways we approach marketing are not the same," says marketing specialist **Nicole Nair**. "So that begged the question: Which processes were more effective between us, and which were not as effective and should be dropped?"

"The system's vice president of technology pointed out that there's no reason why we shouldn't cooperate and share best practices," Willie notes.

"By combining the strengths in both campuses, there's even more we could say about the strength of the university's resume," Nair adds.

Willie concurs. "We are two very different campuses, and when you combine our portfolios together you can see that. For instance, in Chicago we have colleges of medicine, pharmacology, nursing, and about 3,500 hospital beds in three hospitals. In Urbana we have a college of veterinary medicine, some of the best chemists in the world working on potential drugs, fantastic people in math and super-computers, modeling for compound interaction for drug development, and scientists working on imaging devices. When you combine both, we have a remarkably complete coverage of research in technology and healthcare."

Identifying best practices

In determining what is or is not a best practice, Willie notes, you must remain aware of the particular needs of your university. "'Best practice' refers to what's best for *us*, not necessarily what's best for Harvard," he points out. "So, we looked at the deals we have done so far and where they came from. We realized that most have come from the leads of researchers." The team also examined the deals that originated with leads from technology managers to get clues about what worked.

In addition to its review of its own licensing deals, "we also went through some benchmarking processes," says Willie. "We had our interns scour websites from other universities, and we made calls to other OTM's to get a list of their practices and what worked for them. We created a list, prioritized it, and started putting the

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Tips from the Field

Creating a simple, effective blog for your TTO

By Lindsay Polak
Marketing & Communications Manager
University of Colorado Technology Transfer Office

The University of Colorado Tech Transfer Office launched our blog (http://cutechtransfer.blogspot.com/) in the fall of 2008, largely in response to inquiries from the local entrepreneurial community.

Boulder, in particular, is a very tech-forward community, and it often seems that nearly everyone has a blog. We launched ours primarily as a way of staying on the radar and providing an additional point of access to our news and information, alongside our website and e-newsletter. Below I've offered some tips, definitions, and lessons learned from our first year of blogging.

The how-to's

Since blogs are now a mainstream form of communication, there are numerous 'platforms' that make it easy to get up and running -- with no technical knowledge needed. These platforms allow you to edit your content without the need to understand and write web code. We use the Blogger platform; other popular platforms are WordPress and TypePad.

Blogs have a fairly uniform structure and layout, so customizing your blog can be as simple as choosing colors and uploading your logo. If someone in your TTO happens to have web design skills (try asking a student), you can create a much more unique look, but it's not necessary. **Tip:** Check with your institution's communications office about use of logos, etc. on an external website.

What to include

You can include a wide range of different types of content on your blog. Ours is news-focused, and captures our press releases, important events, podcasts, etc. We've also begun to highlight available technologies once a week, with a short blurb and a link to a longer marketing summary. This type of content takes minimal effort to create for the blog, since it is based on pre-existing material, but it helps keep our audience engaged -- especially people who get their news and information primarily online.

You can also include high-quality commentary on current events relevant to tech transfer, along with news about your office. This approach takes significantly more time, since someone from your office will need to create this content from scratch, but it is valuable as a way to engage and expand your community. **Tip:** Before embarking on a time-intensive commentary-based blog, investigate whether other blogs are already providing quality content on the same topics you'd like to cover. If so, you'll need to adjust your blog's focus, or find a way to tailor your content to make it more relevant for your audience. For instance, in our blog we occasionally comment on important legal decisions related to intellectual property; while IP law itself is covered heavily in the blogosphere, we provide information specifically targeted to researchers and investors about how a new decision might affect tech transfer and university IP.

Decisions about what types of content to provide should be driven by your goals: a news-based content stream helps maintain connections to your existing audience (faculty, local entrepreneurs and investors, local government), while a commentary-driven blog will help bring new people into your network, and can also help educate your existing audience.

Who are you reaching?

Our experience is that our blog is read mostly by an external audience, while faculty rely more on our e-newsletter. However, we expect this dynamic to shift over the next few years, as younger faculty seem more attracted to a blog format. **Tip:** One of the advantages of using a blog platform is that it's easy to create an RSS feed, which works by subscription -- your readers subscribe to your feed and receive it through their preferred feed-reader, without having to remember to check back for new content. We've found that our younger, more tech-savvy readers prefer this format over our newsletter, which often gets lost in the daily e-mail barrage.

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return." The onus is on the patent holder, he notes, to better explain the nature of their patents or inventions, and why they are superior or performing effectively.

"Fewer than 5% of patents have value. In order for patents to have optimal return, the 'stars and planets' need to align," he explains. "It's great to have a wonderful invention, but you need a strong patent that reads on the right commercialized invention at the right time. If you have a fairly weak invention with no revenues, even a beautifully prosecuted patent will have little or no value. Patents have the most significant value when the right claims read on a successful infringing product. Other value scenarios are more abstract and difficult to convey."

Demonstrate value

Accordingly, if you have such an alignment it must be communicated clearly. "The role specific rights play in generating return on investment is rarely identified, let alone articulated," Berman notes."It's not always about licensing income; it will depend on the patent holder as to which business model is right. Everyone agrees that the freedom of action that certain patents provide is valuable, but just what does that mean to the average stakeholder? It really means a company can sell more products, enjoy higher profit margins, and secure greater market share."

How much more? "A smart patent holder should make some attempt to quantify that," Berman recommends. "It would be a communications 'home run' to show how a patent advantage translates -- even approximately -- into dollars and cents."

For universities, however, the message can and should go further than monetary return, he adds. "The easiest and most traditional way is through royalties -- that's how AUTM identifies the big players," says Berman. "But I would go beyond the income-generated formula for return. Maybe the university's goal is to generate some income but provide inventions that help companies achieve certain social goals. So the value of IP could be in social good, in research facilitated, in grants or funding generated, in innovation enabled, or in creating a specialty area for the university -- but you do not hear much discussion about this."

Some universities, he notes, may be 'embarrassed' that they are not generating much money. "But maybe they shouldn't be -- maybe they're doing what's right for *them*, given the complexities of patent licensing and the risks of enforcement."

Another level of success that should be communicated, Berman continues, is how well your spinoffs have done. "What is the university's equity in those companies? How will they monetize it? How have these companies evolved from seed capital to IPO, or whatever exit is appropriate? What does it mean in monetary terms?" Berman poses. "If you have shares in a company that is generating a profit, or has been sold and you can cash in or trade those shares, that's a win that can go unnoticed. Sometimes universities lose sight of these communications opportunities."

Whatever value you are communicating, Berman stresses, you must be specific. "A license does not mean very much if you cannot convey some level of detail," he says. "Specific numbers and performance metrics are always appreciated. If you can't be that specific, suggest the value of the license or its potential. If you secure a license with a significant company or companies, let stakeholders know who they are, or at least in which industries they operate. Also, you might explain the potential impact and discuss the size of the market or how it has grown or will grow. "

Don't fear transparency

Academic institutions tend to shy away from discussions of commercial impact and entrepreneurial activity, fearing backlash from those who view the university mission as above these considerations. But Berman maintains it's a mistake to downplay commercial issues, and a policy governing communications can help ensure a consistent messaging effort. "There is pressure on universities to conduct basic research, and there is a certain comfort level with discussing the genesis of the invention. But when you get off into areas of entrepreneurial consideration, they are often thrown off course," he asserts. "Being transparent about that is healthy; IP holders should have a general policy concerning how much, when and where, to communicate to stakeholders."

Such a policy can come in handy, particular-

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ly when IP rights seem to conflict with a school's social mission, he continues. For example, a university may be seeking to extend a pharma patent to derive more income from a drug. "That can look nasty; people will say you just want to keep the price higher and assure more income," says Berman. "You can be looked upon as impeding competition or innovation -- the same way a corporation might be viewed. When a university appears to be working to prevent a generic drug from getting into the hands of more people at a lower price, it needs some context."

That's when an IP communications strategy is most needed, Berman emphasizes. "If you are more transparent and better at explaining why you are doing what you're doing, that can only help," he says. "Patents exist to be used. Most holders cannot afford to assert them when infringed because they lack experience, time, and capital. It's not a crime for a patent holder to enforce its rights. On the contrary, it is a crime to use someone's invention without permission -- even if it is for a good cause or to offer a good product at a lower price."

IP owners should not fear transparency, says Berman. "They should embrace it; it is an opportunity to show they really know what they are doing," he declares.

Certainly there are limits to the type and amount of disclosure, and you must feel your way. "You don't have to open everything up totally, but open discussion about a holder's IP can be productive," he says. "If universities want to continue to be in the IP business, they need to be smarter about conveying their objectives, strategy, and performance. They are part institutions of higher learning and part business, and they are participating in competition for innovation that benefits university stakeholders and society. De-mystifying the nature of research -- what it does, who it helps, and the strength of your inventions and patents -- can reap significant benefits for the university."

Finally, notes Berman. "there is confusion surrounding IP rights, especially patents -- how they work, what they mean, and the benefits and jobs they facilitate. IP communications presents an opportunity to teach, explain, communicate and, of course, influence."

Contact Berman at 212-508-9664 or bberman@brodyberman.com. ◆

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One of the reasons for taking this approach, he explains, is to avoid duplication of effort on the different campuses. "Anthony's expertise is in the medical area; we couldn't afford to put someone [with that special expertise] on each campus," says Uhlmann. "Also, this was in part an effort to move away from the 'cradle-to-grave' approach to marketing that some smaller or newer tech transfer offices have to follow."

Finding a single person to try to cover all of the specialized areas of IP produced at the university, he notes, would be difficult at best. "The goal is for us to create units that provide that expertise, and as a system to make them available to all the campuses," Uhlmann explains.

It made sense to make the first hire in the medical devices field because it represents a large percentage of technology developed at the university. "For the last decade the majority of our license income has come from the medical field, and since we have medical schools at two campuses we thought it was a good area to start with and focus on," he says. "Our next goal is to get a marketing specialist in the engineering field, because the Missouri S & T campus and the MU engineering school provide half of our disclosures."

Market-specific expertise

The vision for these positions, says Harris, is to create sources of expertise analogous to those found at financial investment firms. "These firms have a number of specialized industry experts," he notes. "Similarly, if we had experts in each industry to provide market analysis of a technology, it would be the most informed analysis that you can provide for case management." With these market-specific experts, he continues, each campus will have the opportunity for assistance in identifying potential licensees, and for pointing out strategies to ensure successful license negotiations.

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"It's an additional layer -- an internal sales approach to IP marketing which really drives the metrics in regard to demand generation, prospect qualification and management," Harris explains. The new marketing staffers will also serve as "drivers for negotiating with potential licensees in terms of what works and what doesn't, and in terms of how to market the technology and to whom," he summarizes.

"I think the interaction [between the system-wide marketing experts and the campus TTOs] will be a little different for each campus based on needs and size," adds **Chris Fender**, director of the Office of Technology Management and Industry Relations at the University of Missouri-Columbia. "Our campus is the flagship, and we have more internal resources than others do. For example, we are putting together teams in specialized areas for case management -- biomedical, engineering, and agriculture/life sciences. Our hope is working with Anthony [and other marketers] will help us in identifying key marketing impact areas, and we will come away with a stronger marketing plan."

A team approach is critical to making sure the system-wide marketing staffers make a strong impact, Uhlmann emphasizes. "We don't want a staff member to have to negotiate alone; the entire team, which will include a marketing and an IP specialist, will be available to support the case manager in negotiating the agreements," he explains.

Harris says the new staff will not only help with licensing efforts, but also open up the opportunity for improvement in two other key areas of marketing: internal and external branding, and internal public relations. "Historically, many faculty members have said that we have not done a good job marketing our resources to industry, so we feel this is an opportunity to show industry that we've put systems into place to better satisfy their needs," he says, which helps build the university "brand" as a technology source. "At the same time, we will say to the faculty, 'This is the new face of tech transfer -- a team effort between campuses and the system.' These are the two byproducts we want to pull out of this transition."

Other resources being added

The dedicated marketing staff are not the only resources being added to support the system's tech transfer efforts. Each campus is also adding a licensing assistant to work with faculty, particularly during initial invention triage. The idea is to maintain closer contact, better communication, and further the relationship-building already being emphasized by Harris and other TTO staff. "I think in general as we grow larger in our efforts, it's important to grow 'smaller' as well -- to maintain a closer connection with the faculty, and to maintain their confidence in our ability to meet their needs in commercialization," says Fender.

Harris is also making infrastructure investment, seeking to improve efficiency with the rollout of an electronic records management system. "As we begin to come up with marketing strategies and talk to specific licensees, all of the information will be managed electronically, providing better access to all stakeholders in the process," he says.

Contact Fender at 573-884-8296 or fenderc@missouri.edu; Harris at harrisan@missouri.edu; and Uhlmann at 573-882-2821 or UhlmannS@umsystem.edu. ◆

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strategies we liked into practice."

One such strategy involved looking at their IP not so much in technology buckets, but in *market* buckets. "Historically we'd use buckets like 'electronics,' or 'photonics,'" Willie explains. "But that doesn't really help you go out there and find out who wants it. Now, we put the same technologies into marketing buckets, such as therapeutics, diagnostics, research tools, and so on. These are further broken down into 'cell buckets.' For example, 'diagnostics' covers the waterfront, but then when you link diagnostics and MRSA, the picture becomes clearer."

You can't efficiently categorize most healthcare technologies by a single bucketing process, he emphasizes. So, once the 'cell buckets' are completed, two additional categorizations are made -- what kinds of diseases the drug might affect, and what body systems are involved. "This

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way you know what a thing is, and what it's good for," Willie says. "When you go to Lilly or Merck, they will break it down that way, so our bucketing reflects that process."

Along with external marketing, a benchmarking process was also used for internal marketing, Nair adds. "We wanted to raise our profile, take a value-added approach to the campus, and see which strategies were working and which were not."

Cross-pollination of ideas

The best practice sharing with the Chicago campus has led to improvements in numerous marketing activities, both internal and external. In fact, collaborating on one particular practice led to a two-step improvement -- one originating from each campus.

"It's really a simple thing," says Nair. "We had these 'coffee breaks' where we would go to different units and set up a time where we'd be in a central gathering place." It was not an effort to "pitch" the office per se, but just to be there to answer faculty questions, she explains.

"The Chicago campus had not been doing this, but when we told them about the idea they picked it up," says Nair. "Then, they suggested an enhancement, which we have now adopted. They started adding a small raffle component; you drop off your name and you get, for example, a box of chocolate. Now we are both doing it and reinforcing the positive aspects to each other."

"We find people will go to those sessions in their building who would otherwise not call or e-mail us," notes Willie. "They walk in with a question all ready; some even walk in with a disclosure in their hand."

He adds that his campus is about to adopt a method Chicago uses to 'broadcast out' new technologies systematically. "They have very good organization and methods," he says. "They have a coordinator there who will take inventions, once they've been screened and approved for marketing, write up a flier, and work with the technology managers and their databases to figure out what companies and contacts may want it. Then, [the coordinator] puts together a mini-mass mailing campaign, and the responses go to the tech managers; the organization is remarkable."

The campuses are even sharing market research information, Nair adds. "We are using database tools to get market information that they are not using and vice versa," she says.

Another winning strategy at Urbana, Willie reports, involves what are called 'OTM residences.' "We have people placed in various units," he explains, to get tech transfer staff closer to university researchers. "So, for example, at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology, I have an office and people know they can talk to me." These OTM residences, which also include an intern, are funded by the units themselves. Different technology managers and interns reside in other units.

A 'formalized' partnership

As this process of sharing has evolved, a more formalized partnership has developed. "Prior to this, we knew what *we* had, but not what each *other* had," says Willie. "By formalizing the relationship, we can now have a better sense of where the priorities of each office are, what their strengths are, and what types of industries and groups we should be approaching."

Part of the more formal process is a regular schedule of contact. "I'm in Chicago every week," says Willie. "We have a market process team that will meet on that day by telephone. Our directors also go back and forth on a routine basis."

Over time, the benchmarking and best practice sharing becomes second nature. "Once you start to think about the other office in everything you do, it becomes institutionalized," he observes.

"We have a trade show coming up," adds Nair. "In the past I might have called Chicago and asked

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if they had any technologies that were a good fit. Now, no matter which campus goes to a trade show the *system* goes. There are brochures from both campuses with coordinated graphics."

In fact, notes Willie, part of Nair's role now is to maintain a trade show calendar and to reach out to all tech managers at both campuses, share the calendar, and ask if others should be included. "They can now see on a single spread sheet a snapshot of what everyone's doing -- who's going to the meeting, what market buckets are involved, the cost of attending, the booth, and so forth," he says. "That's the kind of tool that's representative of what we'll be doing more and more of here."

The two offices have virtually become one, Willie says, resulting in a net gain for both. "We're sharing leads, contacts, and information about different companies now. On each campus there is now a point person who walks around the office looking for leads for the other office."

Contact Willie at 217-244-5956 or stvwille@uiuc.edu. ◆

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To drive readers to your blog, it's important to make sure you're using all existing communications channels to let your audience know about this new resource. **Tip:** While we officially launched our blog in the fall last year, we began posting content in July 2008. When we began announcing the new blog, potential readers were able to see several months' worth of content, helping them see the value of following/subscribing.

It's also helpful to ask your partners (incubators, local government, etc.) to link not just to your main webpage, but also to your blog. In particular, contact bloggers in your local tech and start-up communities and ask them to let their readers know about your new blog. We've noticed that having a blog makes it clear that our office is business- and tech-savvy, and gives us additional credibility in our highly tech-based community.

Contact Polak at lindsay.polak@cu.edu. ◆

State innovation agency's web site offers useful model for TTOs

The Oklahoma Center for the Advancement of Science and Technology (OCAST), a state agency, was established to foster innovation in existing and developing businesses, support basic and applied research, facilitate technology transfer, and provide seed capital for innovative firms and their products. Though it is not a TTO per se, the center's recent revamp of its website -- a key part of its marketing and outreach -- offers a useful model for university technology managers.

The agency is no stranger to the academic tech transfer arena. "Universities and their start-ups are a key customer for OCAST; we have traditionally funded a lot of research projects for university researchers," says center deputy director **Steve Biggers**. The funding provided by OCAST is in turn used to secure federal funds. OCAST grants are for $145,000 over three years, and the agency provides a total of $3.5 million each year. "This helps pull in $13 million to $14 million a year in federal funds," Biggers reports.

In addition, OCAST has an applied research program for inventors trying to spin out technologies. "We cover half the cost of the research, with a required match," Biggers explains. "And that research must lead to commercialization." OCAST puts up about $4 million a year for this program, with matching funds from angels or companies seeking to partner with the university. In some cases, he adds, a university foundation or the federal government provides the matching funds.

The assistance OCAST provides is well illustrated by a recent agreement between the University of Oklahoma Office of Technology Development and i2e, a private non-profit entrepreneurial consulting and services firm. The two just signed an agreement to work together to speed tech transfer and create start-up companies around OU technologies. i2e, which was originally founded in 1997 as the Oklahoma Technology Development Corporation, receives the predomi-

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nance of its funding from OCAST. (**See related article, page 118**.)

The center has retooled its website to increase networking opportunities for students, faculty, and start-ups, as well as to better market its clients' IP and enhance outreach to stakeholders. "We're in the third generation of the site, and we are constantly looking for ways to provide better service to our client customers," says Biggers. "The staff said, 'Let's try to make it user friendly for people trying to connect with each other.' It's very time-consuming to try to [meet] one-on-one, and if they could do it electronically it would benefit business, students, and faculty."

Site offers array of services

The revamped OCAST site (**http://ocast.ok.gov**), which debuted about four months ago, provides a number of different services, including:

• **Radio broadcasts:** The programs, which are co-hosted by OCAST executives, cover both emerging and more established technologies. Businesses are interviewed about those technologies and are asked to present them in a way that would appeal to the general public. The companies may or may not be university spinoffs, "but a lot of research here in Oklahoma is university-based," notes Biggers. "The task is to commercialize it." Past interviews remain available on the site, giving them an indefinite 'shelf-life' for reaching target audiences. "We have found, unexpectedly, that the businesses will post a link to the broadcast on their site as well, which is an added plus we did not anticipate," says Biggers. "It's a great way to communicate."

• **OCAST funding workshops:** These free online workshops give researchers information on how to get funding from OCAST. "The staff who facilitate the workshops are well experienced and have observed a number of external reviews, so the participants get good insight into what makes a successful application," says Biggers. "It's especially helpful for new investigators and researchers, because there's not much mentoring available at that level -- they just have the expectation they will get the funding."

• **Internet workshops:** The site offers "do-it-yourself" PowerPoint slide presentations that cover OCAST funding basics. "They cover the whole gamut of topics, from the type of match required, requirements of the program itself, the basics of the application, and so on," Biggers explains.

• **Available grants:** The site provides links to various research grants. "Many researchers know where they are and how to get them, but this will provide the direct link; or, there may be a start-up business looking for a grant for the first time," Biggers explains. "We also have staff to help [users] narrow down their targets and get headed in the right direction."

• **Intern database:** The database provides an avenue to increase science and technology education and business connections for students, faculty, and businesses. Students can search for internships based on personal criteria; place their resume online for view by Oklahoma companies; and receive e-mail notifications when a new internship is posted based on specified criteria. Research-based internships and faculty sponsored research opportunities are also listed. Businesses can post internship opportunities available at their companies and search for students and faculty members who meet their specific requirements. "With the intern program, we're trying to get undergraduates to do research in a business environment, and give them the opportunity to be connected with a potential future employer," says Biggers. "It also provides the universities with an opportunity to tap into this infrastructure."

Other features of the site include a search tool to locate service providers, proposal writing guidance, a calendar of events, and a collection of commercialization success stories.

Getting the word out

To let potential users know about the revamped site, OCAST sent out a statewide news release. "We will do a secondary follow-up once people are settled into school, as well as some direct marketing," says Biggers. "We've learned the hard way that this type of program takes a continuing effort -- you've got to get the word out more than once."

Though the site's metrics don't put it in a class with Amazon, Biggers has realistic but also optimistic expectations for its impact. "I looked on the site this morning and we had 10 or 15 stu-

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dents who had signed in," says Biggers, who expects more students than businesses to use the site. "You've got to start someplace."

Meanwhile, the OCAST team is "on the lookout" for more opportunities to enhance the site. "You need a continual improvement effort in this type of thing," Biggers asserts. "We will be looking for feedback from users."

Contact Biggers at 405-319-8407or sbiggers@ocast.state.ok.us. ◆

OU hires outside firm to help spur commercialization

If sporadic interaction with an outside technology commercialization firm has been good for its IP marketing efforts, reasoned the University of Oklahoma Office of Technology Development, then more regular interaction would be even better. That's why OU recently signed a collaborative agreement with i2e, Inc., a private not-for-profit Oklahoma corporation that has worked with a number of research institutions in the state to enhance technology transfer and commercialization, particularly with start-ups.

While this is a "first of its kind" agreement for OU (as well as for i2e), "it's more of an extension of our relationship," says **Daniel Pullin**, MBA, the university's VP for strategic planning and technology development. "In the past, we have crossed paths and opportunistically worked together, but we never had a structured partnership where both organizations were aware of the deal flow of the university and the client roster at i2e. Deals would come here and there, but sort of through the winds of commerce rather than through a structure designed to maximize opportunities for both of us."

While OU will continue to drive technology licensing directly to established companies and certain start-up companies, the agreement will bolster the school's efforts to assess and create high-potential start-up companies based on its innovations. According to i2e, it works with anywhere from 60 to 100 start-up companies annually, including but not limited to university spinouts.

By working more strategically with i2e, OU expects to increase the efficiency of start-up creation at the proof-of-concept and private funding stages. The firm has access to angel and seed capital organizations and operates a state-sponsored gap fund of about $12 million, from which it can make seed-stage equity investments in the $400,000 to $500,000 range.

While i2e will help the university develop start-ups across all industry sectors, about half of OU's IP disclosures are in the life sciences arena, mostly due to the school's Health Sciences Center campus in Oklahoma City.

Because i2e "has a very robust client portfolio," Pullin says, it can help OU market its IP in earlier stages as well. "They may have a client in a certain industry space that is technology-focused, and principals of that company may have heard of research at the university. If they inquire about us with i2e, we can respond to the request," he notes.

In short, Pullin says, "we're talking about being very proactive, creating information transfer so they understand the quality of our portfolio and we understand the breadth of their clients and the commercial opportunities therein. Then together, we can determine the most appropriate partners and the most efficient commercialization path."

Four major benefits seen

Pullin says the collaborative agreement offers OU four major benefits:

1. Improving methods for bringing OU technologies to the marketplace: "i2e has very strong business development resources, and our strength is generating IP," Pullin notes. "There will be no duplicative efforts; we will put our supply of technology into the marketplace through their professional team and client base."

2. Pursuit of potential joint venture funding opportunities: "A joint effort between OU and a not-for-profit organization like i2e can make us more competitive with a number of funding agencies and foundations," says Pullin.

3. Improved metrics: "I think that having a closer working relationship allows leadership at OU and i2e to put their heads together and come up with true performance metrics to assess the

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quality of work we're doing as it pertains to commercialization efforts," he observes.

4. Fulfilling the service mission: "We are interested in research teaching; in service to the community; and in cultivating and nurturing young talent," Pullin comments. "For example, our Center for the Creation of Economic Wealth provides real-world entrepreneurial experiences to interdisciplinary students at OU. Our partnership with i2e will create more opportunities for that young talent to be placed in knowledge-based jobs in Oklahoma."

Laying the foundation

Since signing the agreement in late summer, the new partners have been learning more about what each brings to the table. "We are using a variety of mechanisms centered around regular portfolio meetings, although both organizations dialogue regularly," Pullin states. "The formal meetings will be held at least quarterly, but we'll certainly meet on an as-needed basis."

The two organizations are "far beyond the 'getting to know you' stage, and are now into the tactical execution of the partnership," he adds. For example, they are sharing information such as market data, due diligence on potential licensees, and prevailing terms and conditions in the marketplace. "[So] if we are looking to license a technology to a certain company, i2e can tell us what deals in that industrial genre are going for," Pullin offers.

"What we are trying to do as part of the formalization and standardization of our relationship is to establish these quarterly meetings -- mainly to formalize the discussion and communication channels so that we can try to link [the university with] the private sector companies we work with that might have an interest in licensing [OU technology]," adds **David Thomison**, i2e's VP of enterprise services. "We are looking to create events, so we'll say, 'Here are the companies we work with, they are interested in these spaces; do you have any researchers in these areas, or on the fringes of these areas?'"

The reason for holding the meetings more regularly, he explains, is for both parties to keep up to date with new opportunities. "Our client list may change, there may be market direction shifts, or we may have a need to target a new

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market," notes Thomison. "Of course, there is a quid pro quo; OU will share information about some prominent IP their researchers are developing, so we can look for a fit."

Thomison sees the activity thus far as "Step One" of the expanded, formalized relationship. "Step Two involves [determining] whether a particular technology has 'legs,' and adequate market breadth, and if it has advanced to the point where it can be a spin-out. We add market assessments of adequacy or inadequacy, and responses from entities closer to the market, which adds credibility." If the responses are positive, he continues, "we will engage with the management team and hopefully provide business develop planning, market assessment, and access to capital."

Pullin concludes, "combining both networks will help us to secure the most appropriate funding opportunities for certain technologies, and leveraging both networks will also enhance management recruitment for technologies that grow beyond the university."

Contact Pullin at 405-325-9030 or dpullin@ou.edu; contact Thomison at 918-877-0457 or dthomison@i2e.org. ◆

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1) Home Run Strategies: Finding, Nurturing, and Securing Maximum Revenues from Disruptive University Technologies

Wednesday, November 11, 2009 ~ 1:00-2:30 pm (Eastern Standard Time)

Presenter: Dr. Rainer Iraschko, Vice President Research, TRLabs
Program Agenda:

- How to identify which emerging sectors are prime for disruptive research and development
- The details of TRLabs' innovation roadmap for disruptive technology success
- How effective industry partnerships can aid in your efforts
- Which innovations could meet the "disruptive" label by following a project proposal checklist
- How to adapt the "Disruptive Technology Challenge" -- how and why it was formed, what challenges TRLabs faced, and the lessons they learned in implementation
- Steps to creating an effective "disruptive team" including researchers, tech transfer staff, marketing and sales, and VC and Angel investors.

PLUS: Get your most challenging legal questions answered during the interactive Q&A with the expert!

Who Should Listen: Technology transfer managers and professionals, administrators and deans, research commercialization directors, economic development officials, university CFOs, licensing specialists, start-up managers, researchers and entrepreneurs, university research VPs, IP consultants, and others with an interest in identifying and nurturing disruptive technologies.

Description: Statistics don't lie, the saying goes. And when it comes to the time, money and effort spent on patenting and licensing university IP, there's one real eye-opener: Just a few technologies out of the thou-

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2) Shifting Your TTO from Market Push to Market Pull: Finding the White Space

Thursday, November 12th, 2009 ~ 1:00-2:30 pm (Eastern Standard Time)

Presenter: Lina Ramos of EMERGING GROWTH Enterprise
Program Agenda:

- What specific ongoing tactics can be used to measure the pulse of industry partners and the marketplace itself to guide research efforts?
- What internal communication strategies need to be used to gain the trust of and form alliances with researchers towards a "pull" strategy?
- How to target the right industry contacts
- Strategies for marketing your ability to meet industry needs and overcome negative perceptions of TTO responsiveness
- What assurances or contractual agreements can be used to ensure the market demand you are trying to meet doesn't disappear once you have spent millions trying to meet the need expressed?
- And much more…

PLUS: Get your most challenging questions answered during the interactive Q&A with the expert!

Who Should Listen: Technology transfer managers and professionals, sponsored research managers, corporate and industry liaisons, administrators and deans, research commercialization directors, licensing specialists, start-up managers, researchers and entrepreneurs, university research VPs, IP consultants, and others with an interest in adopting a market pull strategy.

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Home Run Strategies: Finding, Nurturing, and Securing Maximum Revenues from Disruptive University Technologies continued ...

sands patented and licensed each year account for 95% of the revenues generated by research commercialization activity. In your entire portfolio, there may be one or two technologies that could become part of this select group -- a "home run" that delivers big royalty or equity dollars for years to come.

These elusive big winners, regardless of the market or type of product, almost always share one common characteristic -- they are disruptive technologies that are game-changing in their space. In the current environment, it only makes sense to spend more of your limited time and resources identifying, protecting, nurturing, and bringing these home runs to market. That's why *Technology Transfer Tactics Distance Learning Division* has scheduled a breakthrough audioconference that will highlight Canada's leader in information and communication innovation, and its proven model for nurturing disruptive technologies.

TRLabs' Vice President of Research, Rainer Iraschko, PhD, will reveal the factors that dictate its commitment to nurturing select disruptive technologies, review the lessons learned in development and commercialization efforts, and delve into the inner workings of the organization's "Disruptive Technology Challenge."

Shifting Your TTO from Market Push to Market Pull continued ...

Description: Many tech transfer offices are stuck in reactive mode. They dutifully receive invention disclosures from faculty, assess them for commercial potential, file patents and provisionals, and seek licensees. This reactive strategy, while understandable given staff shortages and time constraints, does not even attempt to address one very critical factor in successful research commercialization efforts: **WHAT DOES THE MARKET WANT.**

Recognizing this, a growing number of TTOs have moved away from traditional and reactive "market push" strategies toward a more proactive "market pull" approach. Rather than passively hoping that technologies with appeal to industry will cross their desks, they are actively engaging with innovation seekers in corporations and government agencies to determine their most pressing needs - and then feeding that information back to their research labs. By listening to their markets, and building strong relationships with industry, they are smoothing a path to licensing revenues and assuring that more of their research dollars result in products that companies **WANT AND NEED**.

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The concept isn't hard to grasp, but execution can be difficult. It involves not only a shift in strategy and thinking, but also delicate negotiations with researchers who may balk at being "dictated to" about their research focus. In addition, it involves tough legwork in building a "listening" process in the form of strong industry relationships. But the end result can significantly increase your research funding and licensing revenues while cementing long-term corporate partnerships.

That's why *Technology Transfer Tactics' Distance Learning Division* has recruited one of the nation's leaders in market pull strategy, Lina Ramos of EMERGING GROWTH Enterprise, to give you practical strategies on determining the IP and innovation needs of industry and putting your researchers to work on meeting those needs.

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