



INTUITIVE SYSTEMS
Leadership for the 21st Century: online strategies and communications

The Intuitive Life Business Blog



Dave Taylor has been involved with the Internet since 1980 and is widely recognized as an expert on both technical and business issues. He has been published over a thousand times, launched four Internet-related startup companies, has written twenty business and technical books and holds both an MBA and MS Ed. Dave maintains three weblogs, The Intuitive Life Business Blog, focused on business and industry analysis, the eponymous Ask Dave Taylor devoted to tech and business Q&A and The Attachment Parenting Blog, discussing topics of interest to parents. Dave is an award-winning speaker, sought after conference and workshop participant and frequent guest on radio and podcast programs.

Solving the University to Industry Tech Transfer Dilemma

One of the greatest challenges in the innovation economy is the successful transfer of research into the commercial realm. I experienced this firsthand when I spent a few years working at **HP's R&D Labs**: while we were creating the future, none of the product divisions were interested in helping "productize" our inventions. There's no better example of this dilemma than the story of **Xerox PARC**, of course, and it's a fascinating topic, but let's just note that it's very difficult to turn invention and innovation into a successful business.

Starting with the emergence of the dot-com era, the modern approach seems to be having students and professors duck out of the university environment and spawn their own firms, hoping that their R&D skills are useful in a more mainstream business setting. While this accomplishes the transfer, it commonly fails and, without the backing of the university or research facility, there's an unnecessary disconnect and a dangerous break between creating a hotbed for innovation and enjoying the upside of the commercial opportunity.

But what if there was a better solution to technology and innovation transfer?

The **Technology Transfer Office** at the **University of Colorado** think they've hit on a better approach, one that lets the University retain partial ownership of innovations produced on campus while pairing up the researchers with local investors and business entrepreneurs.

That's how I ended up spending this morning in a room with about a hundred other entrepreneurs and business people at the *Esprit Breakfast Technology Forum*, listening to some very smart research teams pitch their vision for future companies built around their own inventions...

Joint-sponsored by the CU Technology Transfer Office and the Boulder Innovation Center, the Breakfast Technology Forum featured the following groups:

CLP MicroTechnologies, Inc.

"CLP MicroTechnologies is a start-up company that will exploit a novel low-cost fabrication technology to produce microfluidic devices. CLPMT's point of entry into the life science microfluidics market is a rapid, highly sensitive diagnostic device for detection of mad cow disease in live cattle."

Locomotion, Inc.

"Locomotion is a physical therapy device company developing a patented technology

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read. The first product is "Foundations to Literacy", a comprehensive and individualized computer-based literacy program."

Object Recognition

"Object Recognition is an R&D-state provider of computer vision technology that dramatically improves the process of training and successfully recognizing a large variety of objects under highly variable conditions. The company's technology uses biologically realistic neural network methods to perform object recognition in a manner similar to human brains."

OncoLight, Inc.

"OncoLight is developing a screening tool for optically detecting abnormal and cancerous tissue. This system will enable real time detection of surface or near surface tissue abnormalities, including oral, skin and cervical cancer."

MedShape Solution, Inc.

"MedShape Solutions specializes in orthopedic application of shape memory polymers and alloys. It is currently developing a novel ACL (anterior cruciate ligament) device to improve postoperative graft fixation for use in the 175,000 ACL repairs performed each year. The device, activated by body temperature, uses a shape memory polymer that expands to fix the ACL graft in place."

Windom Peak Pharmaceutical, Inc.

"Antibiotic resistant bacteria and weaponized bioterrorism organisms are growing concerns in national defense and worldwide health care. Approximately 70% of the strains of bacteria causing hospital acquired infections are resistant to antibiotics. Windom Peak Pharmaceuticals is developing novel technologies that target the membrane of pathogenic bacteria in ways that will be difficult for the bacteria to mutate around, creating broadly effective therapies for infectious disease."

XenoPure Systems, Inc.

"XenoPure Systems is developing technology for the removal of heavy metals from industrial wastewater at a significantly lower cost than existing systems. The process works well in acidic conditoinis, which eliminates the expense of chemically adjusting pH, and has very low associated energy and material costs."

There are definitely some companies to watch in this list, most notably XenoPure Systems, whose system they believe they'll be able to deploy directly in polluted wetlands for low-cost on-site cleanup, along with retrofitting industrial and nuclear facilities to be cleaner and dramatically less polluting.

The interesting part of this morning, however, wasn't the groups themselves but rather the process whereby the University of Colorado helps inventors and innovators migrate their technologies out of the university setting and into the business world.

The primary organization at CU that manages this transfer is the Technology Transfer Office, which offers the brilliantly named "Proof of Concept Grant" to about ten teams per year.

addressing a critical need in the process of providing walking therapy to brain injury patients - a market growing 7-14% annually. Current treadmill based therapy involves up to 3 physical therapists manually driving a patient's walking motion. Therapy sessions are limited by therapist fatigue and there is a risk of repetitive use injury to the therapist. The External Swing Assist (ESA) device addresses this need by providing a mechanized solution assisting forward leg motion."

Mentor Machines, Inc.

"MentorMachines is a software company dedicate to creating innovative solutions to help children

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These groups aren't ready to become standalone businesses either, so the partnership with the business community is essential for success. One of the most telling comments in this regard was from the head of one of these groups who responded to a question about his business plan with "Well, at this point the technology is still driving the business plan." That's why inventors need business partners in a nutshell.

I believe that solving the technology transfer challenge is critical not just to the success of modern institutions of higher learning but for our society overall. To remain competitive in the future, companies will need to be more nimble and more innovative, so groups like the Technology Transfer Office at the University of Colorado really are blazing a trail, helping ensure the economic vitality of our nation.

Posted by Dave Taylor at October 25, 2005 11:41 AM

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