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Meaningful Gestures: Corrales Company Puts VAF Grant to Work

By Belinda Snyder, Program Manager, Los Alamos National Lab Technology Transfer Division

Ideum, a Corrales-based company founded in 1999, needed help updating its successful gesture-based software and preparing it for international release. In 2011, it was awarded one of three \$100,000 grants that Los Alamos National Security gives tech-based innovators every year through its Venture Acceleration Fund to develop commercial uses for innovative technology and get them to market as quickly as possible.



Ideum first released GestureWorks in the summer of 2009 as a free, unfinished (or “alpha”) version of its software, which analyzes and simulates human gestures for the kinds of touch-activated tables that are increasingly used in interactive educational exhibits. Later that year, Ideum issued an improved version as a commercial product that educators could use to design compelling “touch-table” demonstrations of scientific concepts.

Over the years, Ideum has worked on more than 70 interactive exhibits — mostly for museums — on art, culture, science and history themes. The VAF grant helped the company speed up production of the third commercial version of GestureWorks. “The VAF award allowed us to accelerate our progress to eight months instead of 16,” company founder Jim Spadaccini said. “This has huge implications for getting into the marketplace quickly.”

Ideum hopes to stay ahead of competitors in developing the most comprehensive gesture-based “authoring environment” — a place where end users can create websites, interactive hypermedia, microworlds and simulations.

LANS, the company that manages Los Alamos National Laboratory (LANL), created the acceleration fund to help inventors like the founders of Ideum with the nitty-gritty aspects of business development that are critical to commercializing a technical product or idea. These aspects include coming up with a prototype that tests or proves the concept and helping inventors find their first customer or additional investors.

While any New Mexico company can apply for funding, VAF managers give preference to projects that spin off from LANL technology or expertise and those from Los Alamos, Santa Fe,

Sandoval, Rio Arriba, Taos, San Miguel and Mora counties. Beginning this year, VAF is requiring that funded companies agree to repay the investment if their ownership changes, they achieve identified revenue goals or they leave the state. This payback trigger is designed to assure that the fund is more sustainable for the benefit of future entrepreneurs.

Applications for 2013 VAF funding are due by March 1. “The quality of applications has increased greatly over the years, so we expect the process will be competitive for 2013,” said David Pesiri, Los Alamos National Laboratory's Technology Transfer Division leader.

“For companies not selected for VAF funding, our team often assists by connecting entrepreneurs with other resources to meet their specific needs and reach their business goals,” said Kurt Steinhaus, director of the LANL Community Programs Office. The Community Programs Office coordinates an annual \$3 million investment from LANS. Focused on Northern New Mexico, this investment includes economic development (Los Alamos Connect), building the work-force pipeline and supporting nonprofit organizations.

To learn more about the LANS Venture Acceleration Fund or to apply for funding, visit losalamosconnect.net or contact Belinda Snyder of the Los Alamos Technology Transfer Division at bee@lanl.gov. To learn more about Los Alamos Connect and the Community Commitment Plan managed by the Community Programs Office, contact Vangie Trujillo of the Community Programs Office at Vangie@lanl.gov.

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