



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:
2012

STATUS:
Laureate

Organization:
Entrepreneur Support Center

Organization URL:
www.escenter.biz

Project Name:
Entrepreneur Support Center

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

The Upper Peninsula includes some of the highest unemployed communities in the State of Michigan and the United States. In order to combat this position, MTEC SmartZone and Finlandia University created the Entrepreneur Support Center. This is a facility with laptop computer workstations, a smart board, document camera, video recording and editing, video conferencing, applications software, telephones, high-speed networking and related technologies and a color printer, augmented by professional business consultants from the region for the purpose of engaging the entrepreneurial community. Our goal was to help start 10 limited liability companies. In about 9 months, we have over 45 participants and over 18 businesses started. We are not aware of this type of facility existing anywhere else.

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

The Entrepreneurial Support Center was challenged to provide a fully featured work environment for businesses ranging from high-tech to low-tech and no-tech with a minimal amount of training and staffing support necessary to start entrepreneurial businesses. The Center provides computer workstations that enable users to start their businesses under the direct guidance of service providers. Participants utilize online webinars and video conferencing as the primary educational component. The center itself is configured so that participants can use the facility as

their office. They can log into the phone system including personalized voicemail, outbound caller ID and call forwarding, utilize the Internet, software and printer all as they were their own personalized services.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

So far, the response to the Entrepreneur Support Center has far exceeded our expectations. With nearly 20 businesses started in less than one year, the center is helping to create jobs that might otherwise come to fruition. The center removes a majority of the conventional risk and doubt that entrepreneurs face when starting a company. Businesses are also supporting spin-off jobs in related supporting businesses. For example, a salsa manufacturer is leveraging a partnership with a local packing company to distribute its products in Michigan and Wisconsin. On the other end of the spectrum, a company that has started with a focus to provide math tutoring services has helped students who previously struggled with the subject to increase their grades as well as their overall ability and self-confidence in academics. Students that learn to excel now create our future as they create their own business opportunities.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

"We wanted to say thank you for all the help the Entrepreneur Support Center has done for us. Karen Olson and the Marketing Department are helping us launch our salsa products and dips to the market; with their help in branding, we hope to expand very rapidly. We met with Vollwerths to distribute our products to the grocers and hope to launch within the month. We will be creating a minimum of three jobs just to start and expect many more. However, we do need some start-up cash to launch our products correctly, if you would know of any resources or contacts, your help would be greatly appreciated. Thank You and Happy New Year, Karvakkos Market and Crazy Joe's Salsa."