



Starkville, Mississippi



## MSU starts get advice, feedback from experts

Friday, 02 April 2010



Paul Sims/SDN Jamie Dyer, the chief scientist for Visual Analytic Solutions, gestures as explains the business plan for the company at the Mississippi State University Entrepreneurship Center's Strategy Summit Thursday. VAS was one of 10 MSU startups whose officials were scheduled to make presentations at the summit, where they received expert business advice.

By PAUL SIMS  
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Mississippi State University professor Jamie Dyer laid out the case Thursday for a business which could put software which visualizes weather in the hands of meteorology professionals and potentially many others.

William Aulet, the managing director of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology Entrepreneurship Center sat in the audience as Dyer talked about the concepts behind Visual Analytic Solutions.

Then, Aulet offered his feedback.

"His comments didn't cause me to think we needed to make a new approach. It made me feel confident we're taking the right approach," Dyer, a faculty member in the Department of Geosciences and the chief scientist for VAS, said.

"It's helped crystalize some thoughts and ideas," said Phil Amburn, CEO for VAS.

Dyer and the representatives of nine other MSU startups made pitches to the audience gathered for the MSU Entrepreneurship Center's Strategy Summit on the university's campus Thursday.

"Today is really about the companies ... They will get a chance to present their company and get advice from experts," said Dr. Rodney Pearson, a professor of business information systems who works with the "E-center," as it is known. The center is a joint effort between the Bagley College of Engineering and the College of Business. "It's just opened a lot of doors and channels ... we probably wouldn't have had," Pearson said.

The companies involved in Thursday's event could "shape their strategies on what these experts have already learned," said Gerald Nelson, director of the Jack Hatcher Entrepreneurship Program and the Thad Cochran Endowment for Entrepreneurship at MSU, two components funding the center.

In explaining the big picture, Pearson said MSU officials want to create an entrepreneurial culture at the university. "That's one of our big goals at the Entrepreneurship Center," he said.

During a break between sessions Thursday, Aulet shared his thoughts.

"The gap between anywhere is changing. ... There's a convergence of culture and business," Aulet, who serves as a mentor to the MSU E-center, said.

He mentioned Starkville's Camgian Microsystems – one of the companies whose officials were making a presentation Thursday – specifically in his comments.

"I they've got a huge advantage," Aulet said, adding they started in Mississippi but could be in northern Virginia, Boston, Mass., the Silicon Valley of California or Austin, Texas.

The company's work force is "hard-working, very loyal" and when company officials invest in training, "they're going to be there for them. There's much less turnover," Aulet said. "The employees can lead a very good life. They get to work quickly. It's a nice life down here," he said.

He said: "I think this idea of physical geographic clustering is less important than it used to be."

In his visits to MSU, Aulet says he's noticed "people are embracing this entrepreneurship culture. That's been by the design here."

A few hours before Dyer's presentation, Amburn – a research faculty member in MSU's Geosystems Research Institute – provided details on VAS.

The company, founded in the fall of last year, is set up to provide software for a three-dimensional visualization of

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weather, Amburn said.

"Our first target for customers is professional and research meteorologists," he said.

A secondary market Amburn and Dyer have in mind is weather enthusiasts.

"It has potential from the sheer size but we don't know the interest in the product," Dyer said after the presentation, adding he's confident the product is a tool professionals can use.

Amburn and Dyer have a goal to launch the product by summer 2011.

Initial platforms for the product will be Microsoft Windows and Linux and a Macintosh version will follow, Amburn said.

"The environment at Mississippi State made our company possible. We are two people from completely different disciplines. We met while working here," he said.

Having met and talked "is how our company got started," Amburn said, noting the company has hired two students.

"We have been very pleased with the support we have gotten at MSU. We've gotten some funding from the Entrepreneurship Center. At least as valuable if not more so has been the advice and mentoring relationship we have found here," Amburn said.

"Jamie is a meteorologist. I am a computer scientist. Neither of us have extensive business experience. That's why this has been so helpful us."

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