

Diversifying

HIGH TECH

By Brian Courtney

FROM MILITARY SIMULATION TO BIOTECH, NEW HIGH TECH COMPANIES FIND CENTRAL FLORIDA THE PERFECT PLACE TO DO BUSINESS

»» Central Florida's high tech business sector is as diverse in composition as that of any major urban area in the country. How and why each company came to the region spans an equally large spectrum. Two of Central Florida's newest companies prove the point. One came by way of Oklahoma. The other is home grown.



HOME GROWN: DiSTI

Joe Swinski arrived in Central Florida in 1986 with a freshly minted college degree in hand and a job offer from General Electric in Daytona Beach. A few years later his career shifted course, landing him at Orlando's University of Central Florida, where he met fellow faculty members William Andrews and Darren Humphrey. Just three years later, in 1994, the three incorporated as DiSTI, and Swinski added "company president" to his resume.

DiSTI provides two separate but related computer-based services. The company develops and distributes GL Studio™, a rapid application development (RAD) tool for the rapid prototyping and simulation of 3D instrumentation, human machine interfaces and innovative user interfaces. Their staff of software developers, IT professionals and graphic artists design, implement and deliver simulation packages, including those used to train aircraft pilots to handle any situation.

The company's first project was a prototype for the Air Force and that tradition continues today, with DiSTI's core client base still the U.S. military.

"It's little known, but Orlando is actually the military simulation capital of the world," says Swinski.

With the U.S. Army's Program Executive Office for Simulation, Training and Instrumentation and Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division located in the area, the company has been able to build upon its relationship with the military.

Business should continue to boom for DiSTI as the armed forces rely more on technology and less on sheer numbers of people.

"We are now working on an F/A-18 virtual maintenance trainer which replaces expensive hardware trainers and older software trainers that provided only movies and static images," says Swinski. "It will enable airplane maintenance staff to move around and interact with the F/A-18 in a 3-D world, similar to a video game, to practice their craft. The cost of building and deploying this type of trainer to a large number of sites is remarkably cost effective when compared to traditional training methods.

"The next wave of growth for GL Studio will be in the area of flight certified avionics. This means that our GL Studio-produced displays will be FAA certificated so that the software can actually be used on live aircraft."

"WE'RE TRAINING PEOPLE FROM COMPANIES LIKE LOCKHEED AND BOEING, AS WELL AS GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, WHO COME FROM ALL OVER NORTH AMERICA FOR OUR CLASSES."

— JOE SWINSKI, PRESIDENT OF DiSTI

The company's other service is to provide engineers with hands-on training classes in the area of distributed network simulation. This is where the three partners draw on their own teaching backgrounds.

"We're training people from companies like General Dynamics, Lockheed Martin, SAIC and The Boeing Company, as well as government employees, who come from all over North America for our classes," explains Swinski. "Fortunately, Orlando International Airport provides them easy access to the region and usually there are plenty of flights available."

The market for such training, con-

tinues Swinski, is growing and companies in many traditional fields are turning to technology solutions for their training. "There is no educational application that can't benefit from simulation training," Swinski adds.

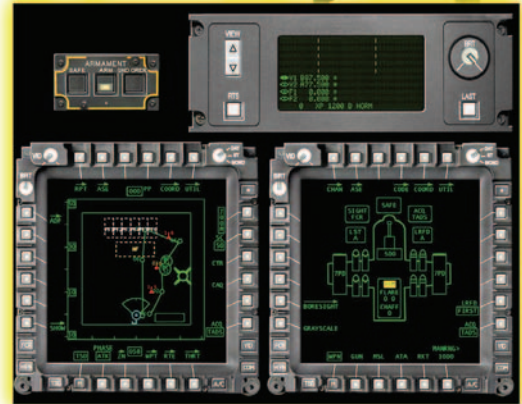
He projects DiSTI to grow about 25 percent this year, reaching \$12-\$15 million in annual sales within the next few years.

"There's plenty of room for growth here," says Swinski, pointing to Central Florida's rapidly expanding research corridor.

The DiSTI management team has also capitalized on its prior relationship with the University of Central Florida, doing both joint projects and recruiting employees to its staff of 30.

"UCF is in a growth mode and the caliber of students being turned out in the computer science program is excellent. We draw from that pool."

And as UCF expands its computer animation curricula, the number and quality of qualified candidates will continue to increase.



"We were courted by Pittsburgh, Boston and San Diego," says Bill Warren, CEO of Orlando's VaxDesign Corporation. "We also looked at Philadelphia. We conducted an exhaustive search throughout the U.S. that combined factors such as: an international airport, access to investor funding, a highly skilled workforce, proximity to a top-notch research university, a good quality of life and, of course, a place everyone wants to live and visit."

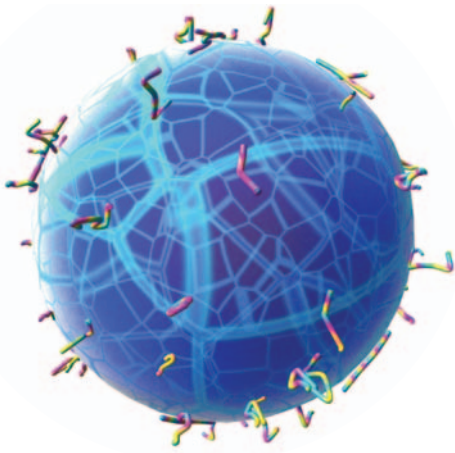
This combination of factors was important for the spin-off company from Oklahoma-based Sciperio, Inc. The other cities trying to lure them had more developed biotech business sectors, but getting into Central Florida's biotech sector early was important to VaxDesign. Their ultimate decision to locate in Orlando helps position the company as a regional leader.

VaxDesign's corporate headquarters will create about 40 high tech R&D jobs and generate nearly \$3 million in capital investment. Parent company Sciperio also opened an office here, which employs about a dozen people.

Finding an affordable, stable location is paramount for a young

WELL RESEARCHED: VAXDESIGN

Ask any stockbroker and they'll tell you biotechnology is one of the market's best investments. Why? Because no matter what else changes in the world, people will always want to avoid illness, be stronger, look younger and live longer. Ask the business development agencies in any metropolitan area why biotech is a good investment and they'll point to the same thing. Then they'll explain that it takes highly trained, highly paid researchers to solve those problems — and that's the type of workforce every region wants to have.



"WE CONDUCTED AN EXHAUSTIVE SEARCH THROUGHOUT THE U.S. THAT COMBINED FACTORS SUCH AS: AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, ACCESS TO INVESTOR FUNDING, A HIGHLY SKILLED WORKFORCE, PROXIMITY TO A TOP-NOTCH RESEARCH UNIVERSITY, A GOOD QUALITY OF LIFE AND, OF COURSE, A PLACE EVERYONE WANTS TO LIVE AND VISIT."

— **BILL WARREN, CEO OF VAXDESIGN**

company gambling in the high-stakes world of medical technology.

"It costs between \$800 million and \$1 billion to bring a product to market," says Warren. "We're producing an artificial immune system — a system in a bottle, if you will — using tissue engineering to replicate human systems; surrogate cells to mimic human tissue made from synthetic or natural polymers such as collagen. These products will allow us to bring products to market much faster than

traditional methods, and with better test data behind them."


The core of this research was developed with the government's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) as part of the Rapid Vaccine Assessment and Pathogen Countermeasures Programs. The process, Warren says, can replace animal testing, which is not only a social hot button, but also a notoriously inaccurate testing method.

"In R&D there is a saying, 'Mice are liars and monkeys are exaggerators'."

The processes have application in medicine, cosmetics and personal care product development.

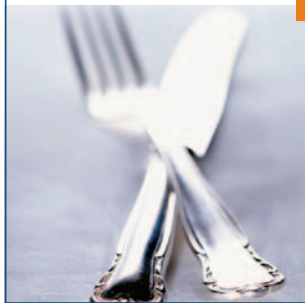
The company, which has already collaborated with researchers at

Harvard Medical School, MIT, University of Miami, Scripps Research Institute, and University of Central Florida, will focus on addressing medical conditions such as tumors, bioterrorism pathogens, HIV, malaria, influenza, Hepatitis B, SARS and Type 1 diabetes. Instead of looking to cure people after they're already sick, VaxDesign focuses on immunotherapy — finding ways to prevent disease in the first place.

"There's been very little progress worldwide in the approach that science has taken to developing vaccines," says Warren. "VaxDesign is creating non-traditional approaches that will shorten development and yield commercially viable products that can change the way we think about treating illness." 



ORLANDO
We Promise
Great High-Tech
Meetings



Orlando offers some of America's best meeting facilities and award-winning service. But don't overlook our 10,000 fine dining seats; 52 million square feet of shopping; ten magnificent spas; 150 golf courses and 17 golf academies; and the greatest collection of high-tech theme parks in the world.

The Orlando CVB will assist you with hotel selection, attendance building and promotion efforts, and many more key services.

Learn why Orlando promises great high-tech meetings, call:

**The Orlando/Orange County
Convention & Visitors Bureau, Inc.®**
407-363-5847
orlandoconvention.com