

MAY 8, 2015

WSU's new Ennovar group announces contract with high-tech firm

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The Wichita Eagle

Wichita State University's effort to build a high-tech job creation machine is taking another step.

WSU recently launched a new self-funded organization, Ennovar, and, at a news conference on Friday, announced a \$600,000 contract with an Internet company, Social Networking Technology.

Under the contract, Ennovar will hire 18 students who will work on behalf of SNT in the fall, and that number could grow to 30 by next year.

When the students graduate, they may be hired by the SNT, which has moved from Silicon Valley in California to Wichita. The fast-growing company said it would also award shares of stock to the university for each student it hires.

The students working for Ennovar would start at \$12 per hour and top out at \$18 per hour. They would also receive \$800 per semester from the company in scholarship money.

Tonya Witherspoon, executive director for Ennovar, hailed it as a win for the students, the company and a university interested in building the local economy.

"Our mission at WSU, at the Innovation Campus, and at Ennovar," Witherspoon said, "is to link tightly with professional companies and bring that work to the university, let our students participate in real-world opportunities and real-world work and also make deep connections to the companies that need to hire them."

She said the organization is also negotiating with a number of other companies for work.

The SNT contract is exactly what WSU's Innovation Campus is all about, said John Tomblin, WSU's vice president for Research & Technology Transfer.

"It allows students to gain real world knowledge, so they are employable before they walk across the platform at graduation," Tomblin said. "That's the goal of the Innovation Campus."

SNT has developed a search engine that searches the Internet and collects vast amounts of data. The massive database — updated every few seconds — is accessible through a portal that would appear as a box on the home pages of their partners, the large media companies. Their first product is a financial information portal, which might start with a question about top stock gainers for the day to hook interest. Viewers can keep clicking through to page after page of information.

SNT splits the revenue from advertising on its site with their media partners.

“What our company is about is Big Data,” said company chairman Stuart Bruck. “We have met with several big, iconic companies in technology over the years — we are only four years old — and they say we are leading the industry in really bringing big media to consumers through Big Data, which is something a lot of people talk about and we are trying to put to practical use.”

Company chief executive officer Kevin Owens said the company has 50 people in California, but it is moving from development to operations. They were impressed with attention to quality and hard work of their Kansas subcontractors. The company needs another 50 people — about half direct hires and the rest students — to adapt the company’s products for its customers’ websites and to oversee quality and operations.

Information on the company is available at www.pass/fail.com.

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