

Niagara College and Telecommunications Partner Converge to Create Business Success

From an original article written by Lisa E. Boyes

Niagara College's partnership with a St. Catharines wire line and wireless reseller has helped the company to expand its customer services and diversify its business through new product development. Currently, Niagara Research, a division of Niagara College, is offering applied research funding and expertise to support the innovation goals of regional companies through the **Applied Research and Commercialization (ARC) Program** supported by the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario.

Roland Bissell, CEO of Convergent Telecom and Converge Wireless, approached Niagara College in late 2007 to help the company grow and diversify its business. It was the beginning of a relationship that both the company and Niagara College expected to be long-term, and over the past three years, has contributed to the skills and knowledge development of close to 30 Niagara College students.

As a Bell Approved Wireless Dealer, Bissell identified the opportunity to develop innovative software applications for wireless Smartphones. The first step was for Convergent Telecom to license two software applications used in the BlackBerry® Smartphone: MyMileageGenie, which tracks time, travel, location and incidental expense using GPS technology; and MyFormsGenie, which provides the client with customized forms and enables the conversion of any paper form, survey or counting template into an electronic template. The MileageGenie software generates expense reports



L-R: Marc Gagnon, Vice President of Business Development, Convergent Telecom and Mike Mantey, Computer Programming Research Assistant and graduate of the NC Computer Programming Analyst program.

in an invoice-like format for reimbursement; the FormsGenie provides a summary of collected data in spreadsheet format. Bissell's concept was to develop a new database management system that would communicate with the BlackBerry Smartphone and the two Genie programs, and store the collected data for simplified reporting. Convergent's clients and their sales team could then access the database management system to

generate real-time expense reporting, eliminating laborious paper logging.

Niagara College Professor Marsha Baddeley supervised the project, with support from Professors David Stovell and Rick Goertz, both of Computer Programming. Students from the Computer Programmer Analyst and Web Design programs provided product development support through classroom course work and dedicated

internship and summer job placements.

The result is MileageGeniePro.com (formerly known as ConvergeTracking.com) a software service solution for business clients across North America. The Convergent Telecom/Niagara College team continues to work on adding new features and functionality for different end users, while improving the user interface design, and testing for bugs and usability. Bissell has begun to market the Convergent Telecom product to his clients as a value-added service at a reduced rate, while Niagara College students provide business support and gain valuable expertise and skills. Convergent Telecom, and other Niagara College industry partners, have benefitted from several business students' development of an international market research report, an advertising/promotional plan, and a human resources training manual for Convergent Telecom new hires.

"We've been able to accomplish a great deal that we wouldn't have been able to do on our own," said Roland Bissell, CEO of Convergent Telecom. "It's a win-win that has helped students gain practical experience, while our company has been able to push the envelope in terms of innovation."

The role of Niagara Research at Niagara College is to provide solutions for businesses like Convergent Telecom. Through the Applied Research and Commercialization Initiative supported by the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, small and medium sized businesses can benefit by collaborating with Niagara College and gaining access to expert faculty and students.

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