

SBIR SUCCESSES



NBDC and SBIR/STTR

NBDC helps university faculty and other entrepreneurs understand the SBIR program, as well as the Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR), a program requiring university/entrepreneur collaboration.

NBDC business services—including market research, manufacturing, capital formation, and management structure assistance—can help grant seekers submit a successful SBIR proposal.

ON THE WEB
SBIRnebraska.unomaha.edu



21ST CENTURY SYSTEMS INC.

21st Century Systems, Inc. (21CSI) began as many small businesses do—as a “lifestyle” company in a virtual office. The company wanted to know if humans and intelligent software agents, working together, could perform better than either did alone. Ten years later, they know their approach is successful—they have numerous commercial software products and a successful, vibrant small business with 140 employees and annual revenues of \$11 million.

The Small Business Innovative Research (SBIR) grant program played a significant role in leveraging 21CSI’s ability to develop and market new products. SBIR grants are given to small businesses with innovative research ideas. Since 1996, 21CSI has applied for more than 70 awards and has successfully leveraged SBIR funding to conceptualize and develop no fewer than 15 innovative products for the Navy, Marine Corps, and other clients.

The Department of Defense typically solicits proposals for products that will help it solve specific problems. 21CSI identified the need for support software to help personnel use sound, computer-assisted data monitoring to manage complex, high-stress and rapidly changing environments. Using SBIR funding, 21CSI was able to develop and commercialize products that met these needs. In the process, 21CSI grew 514 percent in three years and was included on the Inc. 500 list of the fastest growing privately held U.S. companies in 2005 and 2006. Last year, 21CSI also won the SBIR program’s Tibbetts Award for innovation and leadership.

21CSI developed the “core” intelligent agent technology, AEDGE (Agent Enhanced Decision Guide Environment), for decision support software in 1996. 21CSI’s HiRSA (High Resolution Situational Awareness) software was used by the Marine Corps in Fallujah in 2004.

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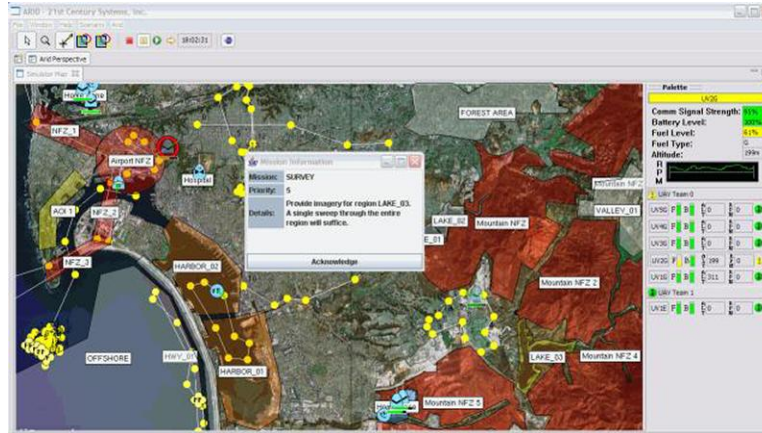


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Intelligent agent technology rapidly analyzes information and presents it to human operators in easily understood visualizations that enable them to act decisively. In sifting through huge quantities of data, the technology quickly identifies patterns, irregularities, or operator-defined characteristics. The agent software also adapts, responds, and learns from individual users in a variety of situations. When the agent encounters new information or situational changes, it adjusts its beliefs, modifies its conclusions and changes its course to provide useful information quickly to human operators.



ARID, UAV tracking data in a given area

In addition to SBIR, the company has participated in the Navy Transition Assistance Program (NTAP), which is designed to help small businesses transition research products to commercial products and meet potential customers. This program helped 21CSI bridge the gap between SBIR phase II funding and commercialization because even when an acquisition sponsor wants to purchase a technology, it can be years before the necessary funding is obtained. 21CSI has also used its own research and development budget in conjunction with a variety of local and federal funding sources to continue product development until acquisition money is allocated.

Through the years, 21CSI has gained significant expertise writing and competing for SBIR awards. For example, they have learned to talk to the customer before even submitting their proposal in order to design the most useful software for the specific application. 21CSI now is exploring commercial, free-enterprise applications for its agent-based software, such as hospital emergency rooms. The majority of 21CSI's employees are located at the Scott Technology Transfer and Incubator Center in Omaha, but they also have offices in McCook, Nebraska, and nine other states.

For more information about 21CSI, see <http://www.21csi.com/index.php>



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