



The Center for Media Design at Ball State University is delivering an innovative new workforce for Central Indiana's "measured marketing" microsector.

Indiana Tech Companies Lead in 'Measured Marketing'

The Indianapolis region has become a hotbed in a growing segment of the IT world known for its ROI tracking.

As more and more companies turn to the Internet for marketing via email, social media, search, video and other rapidly evolving technologies, a breed of specialized companies is emerging to help them refine and measure those efforts. The Indianapolis region is home to more than 70 of those companies, and they're growing fast.

"The growth of this microsector has been dramatic in Indiana the past few years and has outstripped the growth of similar companies in other parts of the country," says David Ferguson, associate

vice president for emerging media and executive director of the Center for Media Design at Ball State University.

According to Douglas Karr, president and CEO of DK New Media, a Greenwood, Ind., firm specializing in new media strategies, being located in or near the 14th largest city in the heart of the country actually works to the region's advantage in this high tech arena — counterintuitive as that may seem. "The compact regional area we're located in helps significantly.

We're connected. We bump into each other at all of our meetings. We speak to each other. All of these things help us to keep moving and growing the sector," he says.

"A no-nonsense, results-driven Midwest work ethic keeps these companies focused and helps them grow," adds Karr. "It's all about getting the work done, about getting results for clients," he says.

The way he sees it, that work ethic translates to corporate culture. "You see a

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David Ferguson



huge turnover in companies out West,” he says. “You meet people who have worked for Google, Yahoo and Microsoft, all in the last few years. What you see here is quite the opposite. You see businesses that have hired great talent, kept that talent and grown that talent — those people are now executive material. And they’ve done it through a disciplined approach to running great businesses with good, solid foundations.”

The success of the measured marketing firms in the region has bred more success. Serial entrepreneurs have started new companies and industry leaders are mentoring younger companies. In Karr’s words, the region has bred an “ecosystem” for success. “We’re sprouting smaller companies off of the bigger successful companies,” Karr points out.

“The thing I like about Indianapolis is that these companies all work together and root for one another. There’s competition between companies like Exact Target and Aprimo, because they’re both hiring fantastic talent, but at the same time Bill Godfrey (chairman and CEO, Aprimo) and Scott Dorsey (co-founder and CEO, Exact Target) are talking to one another all the time and seeing what they can do for the region as well. It’s a solid, solid region for that.”

One of the challenges of maintaining momentum in this fast growing segment is providing the talent to keep it going. Ball State University in Muncie has created a \$17.7 million Emerging Media Initiative that promises to provide critically needed human capital and foster economic development across the state and region. The University’s Center for Media Design, a research



Beyond learning about emerging technologies, students first learn how to communicate effectively regardless of the medium.

and development facility focused on the creation, testing and practical application of digital technologies for business, classroom, home and community, enjoys broad recognition as a leader in emerging media applications.

Ferguson, the center’s director, says the university is considering a certificate that would allow undergraduates or young professionals who are just getting into that marketplace to get “an extra edge in understanding what this field is all about, to learn what the specific skill sets are.”

He says that even recent graduates require additional in-house training once they get into a place like Exact Target. “It might be months or even a year to get them fully up to speed on how this particular part of the industry works. We think we can accelerate that process for those companies so when the employee comes in with a certificate under his or her belt in measured marketing, that person will be ahead of the game, minimizing some of the in-house training.”

Another reason these high tech firms thrive in the region is the cost of doing business. There’s the reasonable cost of living, but just as Central Indiana is at the crossroads of America’s highway system, it’s also at the crossroads of its fiber network, according to Jack Carr, COO of Lightbound,

a communications company that provides Internet, disaster recovery, collocation, voice and managed services to businesses. “A lot of fiber comes through Indianapolis,” he notes. “At the telecom park my datacenter sits in we have access to 19 worldwide carriers.” That allows his company multiple paths to route a company’s data to other locations for redundancy.

The vast amounts of data measured marketing firms track and store requires robust data warehousing, and efficient networks are only part of that equation. The other is cheap power. Carr says Indiana is in the top five states in the country in affordable power.

“The measured marketing microsector certainly is growing fast now, and there doesn’t seem to be any reason to think that’s going to slow much in the future,” says Ball State’s Ferguson. “The technology setting we find ourselves in is just going to get increasingly more accurate, and we’re going to get smarter about what to do with the data. Serial entrepreneurs are staying in the area to start new companies. The students coming out of school are the right kind of people to populate these companies. All those things point to a bright future.

“The more we look at comparable companies in this microsector in other parts of the country, we just see a better story around our companies here,” he argues. “It’s a really compelling thing. This is not an anomaly. This is not a whole sector. It’s a microsector, but it’s growing so fast there’s every reason to believe we’ll see it flourish. You just don’t expect to see that in this economy.”



Students from the Indiana University School of Informatics at IUPUI and local professionals developed Web sites for local not-for-profits during “Refresh Weekend,” a philanthropic event.