

## **Eastern Washington gets high-tech assistance for high-tech businesses**

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Starting a tech-based business comes with its own set of rules, making it increasingly difficult for entrepreneurs of new technologies to move their products from concept to market. Technology business consultants are one type of economic development assistance that entrepreneurs can turn to in getting their companies on the right track.

Sirti, a Washington State economic development agency located in Spokane, Wash., is dedicated to helping technology companies in the Inland Northwest, especially in Eastern Washington. Sirti collaborates with business, higher education and government to accelerate and grow innovative technology companies. John Overby, Client Services Director for Sirti and Mike Urso, Sr. Principal Consultant for Sirti, met with Tri-City entrepreneurs this month and shared their “Lessons Learned from 30+ years of Starting and Running High Tech Companies.”

Typically, what Overby and Urso find when an entrepreneur comes to them is someone who understands his or her technology well, but not necessarily the other elements of running a business. They usually have inadequate funding, an incomplete management team and an under-marketed product.

“Marketing always seems to be a business’s biggest challenge to growth, particularly in the area of price,” said Overby. “In an effort to beat the competition, companies sell their products at too low a price and end up undervaluing their product.”

“If you are in doubt about pricing, you should always start high,” added Urso. “It’s much easier to drop your price later than to raise it.”

Consultants like Overby and Urso bring companies back to the analysis stage of starting a business so that, together, they can re-examine key business assumptions and generate a list of critical issues that will expand, focus, re-direct or validate the business and marketing plans. Critical issues are those issues that, if handled appropriately, will give the company success, but if not handled well, will cause the company to fail or languish. The critical issues then drive the follow-on actions for the business.

To identify a company’s critical issues, Overby and Urso typically hold a one-on-one workshop with the company’s leaders. The workshop lasts anywhere from four hours to an entire day depending on the needs of the business. The exercise shows which issues have the highest potential impact and the most uncertainty. Some common critical issues include weak competitive advantage, lack of technical feasibility, poor cost effectiveness and a weak market.

Once the critical issues have been determined, companies can begin to address them and get back on track. Sirti offers several different options to assist companies in making decisions as they move forward with commercializing their technology. In addition to no-cost business consulting, Sirti provides planning tools and incubation facilities. Overby and Urso live in Spokane but travel frequently to the Tri-Cities to help clients here. Their presentation is available at [http://www.pnl.gov/edo/events/high\\_tech\\_companies.stm](http://www.pnl.gov/edo/events/high_tech_companies.stm).

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