



## **SBIR Funding Success in RTP** **An Interview with Mi-Co**

**E**lectronic forms, NIH and SBIR - a successful combination of ingredients for Mi-Co, an RTP-based tech firm. This month's SBIR column provides an up close look into Mi-Co's recent SBIR success. In a recent interview, Greg Clary, Mi-Co's Chief Technology Office and Co-Founder, provided insights into a number of interesting issues.

### **Tell me about Mi-Co - year founded, # of employees, etc.**

Mi-Co was founded in 1999 and created out of a merger in March 2000 when a software engineering business emphasizing handwritten forms capture joined a hardware business. Both businesses were owned by Greg Clary and Jim Clary. We currently have a total of 17 technologically oriented staff.



### **What products are currently being developed by Mi-Co?**

Mi-Forms offers a unique way to electronically capture, store, recognize and communicate handwritten information traditionally entered on paper forms. We can adapt existing paper forms and provide customers with digital writing solutions using Tablet PCs, Digital Pens, Pocket PCs, and other handwriting capture devices. Mi-Forms maintains computer audit trails and can provide leave-behind capability of the paper record. Mi-Forms patent pending technology recognizes and transforms the handwritten images into data with audio and visual feedback to the user, populating existing databases and automatically eliciting any required follow-up actions.

### **Why is this product/service important?**

Organizations spend over \$360 Billion a year manually converting paper based data into computerized information that can be used by the enterprise. Converting the data in an efficient and effective electronic manner provides real value to our customers. For efficient and effective mobile data capture, systems must be designed to utilize the best in technology with a thorough understanding of how people work - and for many applications, the best user interface is one that people have been using for centuries - pen on paper. As an example, one of our current customers in the health care industry reduced their daily paper workload from 2 hours per nurse to 1 hour per nurse representing a huge cost savings. Another customer cut the time from data capture to data storage in their central data base by as much as 67%.

### **How did you first learn about SBIR funding?**

Jim Clary, Mi-Co's President, was aware of the SBIR program opportunities through his work at Research Triangle Institute. The North Carolina Small Business and Technology Development Center's (SBTDC) Annual SBIR Conference at the NC Biotechnology Center in December 2002 was the first time that we gave serious consideration to applying. We were able to assimilate a great deal of practical information at the SBIR Conference that enabled us to put together a winning proposal.

### **What about the SBIR program was attractive to you?**

Mi-Co's digital form technology is applicable to any type of business that uses paper forms. Our current customers include businesses in healthcare, local government, federal government, financial services and entertainment. Clinical trials is an obvious candidate for Mi-Forms Software because the cost and time to market for new drugs can be greatly reduced by using electronic data capture for drug trials. We did not have a customer in clinical trials at the time of application submission, so we were able to use the SBIR project as a "proof of concept" in the clinical trials field.

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### **Were there any downsides that you noticed about the SBIR program?**

It took a long time to get the results of our application – almost one year! Although to be fair, we should mention that the SBIR award Mi-Co won was a Contract Award instead of a standard SBIR Award and the normal timelines and response times do not apply to contracts.

### **Which agency did you apply to and why?**

Mi-Co submitted an SBIR application to National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health because they had a broad solicitation for a contract on “Capturing Forms Data with Handheld Devices”.

### **How did you find the solicitation that you submitted your proposal for?**

At the SBIR/STTR Biotech conference in 2002, Kay Etzler from NCI used the example of a closed solicitation that was exactly in our field: Capture of Forms Information using Handheld Devices. She also explained that topics from previous solicitations occasionally come up again - and this one did! Based on what we had learned in the Conference, we were able to search at [www.sbirworld.com](http://www.sbirworld.com) and the NIH websites using keywords to find a solicitation that suited our company strengths.

### **Was the solicitation a good fit with your research goals?**

It was a perfect fit. In addition, Greg Clary, Mi-Co Chief Technology Officer and Principal Investigator on the SBIR proposal was able to involve investigators at a local research and teaching hospital to do the actual experiments using a variety of handheld devices (Tablet PC, Digital Pen, and Pocket PC) each with the same forms to determine which data collection method or combination of methods produces the best results in a clinical trials setting.

### **What were some of the most challenging aspects of SBIR proposal development?**

Limiting the scope of the project so that it would fit into the Phase I time frame of 6 months. Identifying the right partner was also a serious consideration.

### **Explain the role of the SBIR award in enabling the development of this technology?**

When the SBIR project is completed, we will be able to go into Phase II and achieve validation of our software product in a new vertical market where we can show significant ROI to other clinical trials customers outside the government.

### **What are your thoughts on the SBTDC's SBIR services?**

The Annual SBIR/STTR Conference is always a great event for learning about SBIR and STTR opportunities. The SBTDC hosts several other proposal writing workshops and accounting workshops through the year which Mi-Co has attended. All of these events are very helpful with the details of writing and submitting and maintaining successful SBIR programs.

**What are Mi-Co's plans after completing the SBIR/STTR research?** We will have the Mi-Forms software system validated for clinical trials and will be better able to sell directly into that market space.

**Are you working on the Phase 2 proposal yet?** Yes.

### **Would you recommend this funding mechanism to other small businesses? Why or why not?**

The SBIR program can provide baseline funding for Research and Development activities that are so critical to any technology business. In Mi-Co's case, we have strong science behind our marketing messages, and the SBIR program has significantly strengthened our position.

More information about Mi-Co is available at: [www.mi-corporation.com](http://www.mi-corporation.com)