

Rising to the Workforce Development Challenge



By Stephanie Lambert, Manager of Student & Educator Services, BEC

What determines individual business and overall industry cluster competitiveness? One of the most important factors contributing to ongoing business success is having a skilled, creative and dedicated workforce ready to meet the challenges of a global economy.

How can business and industry ensure the consistent supply of such a valuable resource? The Software Association of Oregon (SAO) has answered this question with the launch of SEED: Seeding a Future Workforce.

What is SEED?

In partnership with the Business Education Compact (BEC), the SEED initiative offers a proactive solution to the workforce development challenge. SAO and its member organizations have committed to provide meaningful internship opportunities to both students and educators with the goal of making learning more relevant and preparing a future workforce.

This plan of action is in direct alignment with both the Oregon Business Plan and Regional Business Plan as well as with the priorities expressed by the software cluster member-organizations that the SAO serves.

Since the kickoff of the SEED initiative in February 2006, a total of 11 SAO organizations have become part of the workforce development solution. They include Intel, Xerox, Vernier Software and Technology, WebTrends, ESCO, QualityLogic, ColumbiaSoft and others. Together they have developed over 100 internship opportunities for students and educators. Already, the impact is notable.

SEED Success: WebTrends

WebTrends, located in Portland, is the worldwide market leader for Web analytics. Its products enable thousands of Web-smart organizations to improve performance, Web-site conversion and customer relationships.

This dynamic organization met the SEED challenge head-on. CEO Greg Drew made a personal commitment to help meet the goals of the SEED initiative, and his organization has embraced internships. With BEC's assistance, WebTrends has brought on two college-level interns and has recently developed another internship opportunity.

The firm's user-interface design intern is responsible for performing numerous functions including editing wireframes and sitemaps, documenting user experience, and participating in meetings and events to learn interface design tools, practices processes and implementation approaches. Regarding that intern, WebTrends' Jeff Gothelf says this: "Akshay has been a fantastic addition to our team. He's an energetic, thoughtful and enthusiastic asset as we begin the tall order of redefining the WebTrends user experience. We are all glad he's here."

WebTrends also provided an opportunity for a software engineering intern to help develop tools to assist software developers with their daily roles by coding defined features and fixing isolated issues. Regarding that intern, WebTrends' John Rogers says this: "Priya is doing a fine job, picks up on things fast and is eager to learn."

SEED Success: Vernier Software and Technology

For 25 years, Vernier Software and Technology of Beaverton has focused on producing data-collection solutions to create versatile and exciting learning environments. Vernier is changing science teaching and learning through its tools and curriculum for data collection and analysis to transform data into discovery.

Vernier has been chosen as one of Oregon's "100 Best Companies to Work For" each of the past six years. This is a firm that believes in the proactive development of its current and future workforce. Vernier's commitment to workforce development by way of internships is strong. Says Vernier's Pam Harr: "Internships are great for both the company and for the intern. The intern is able to learn a variety of skills and build on them. The company benefits by getting the additional help the intern is able to offer, which could lead into a full time position for the intern."

As part of the SEED initiative and with the assistance of the BEC, Vernier brought on a college student to perform customer service support functions. Regarding that intern, Harr says this: "Alicia is doing a great job. She is productive, has a great attitude, is easy to work with, is very polite, cooperative, follows instructions, is a quick learner and is willing to do what is asked of her."

SEED Success: SAO

Since 1989, the Software Association of Oregon has demonstrated its commitment to helping software-dependent organizations get established, prosper and grow. SAO has been a driving force encouraging member organizations to work with the BEC to offer internships. SAO also has developed a marketing/event planning support internship opportunity for a college student within its own organization.

Be a Part of the Solution

The BEC makes it easy for any business to become a part of the workforce development solution. This non-profit organization has been making the business-education connection for over 22 years. Regarding the BEC, WebTrends' Amy Dobler says this: "Collaborating with the BEC has made the internship project at WebTrends a very easy, smooth and enjoyable process. Any concerns I had about the time required to set up, facilitate and monitor our internship program have been long forgotten thanks to our successful collaboration with the BEC."

Be a part of the workforce development solution. To get started, contact Stephanie Lambert at 503-646-0242x23 or slambert@becpdx.org.

About the Business Education Compact

"Make learning real" sums up the BEC mission. For more than 20 years, this local nonprofit organization has been doing just that by connecting the classroom and workplace with hands-on, innovative learning experiences for students and teachers; by creating and leading working partnerships with business and education; and by advocating for quality education in Oregon. Learn more about the BEC by visiting www.becpdx.org or calling 503-646-0242x23.

About the Author

Stephanie Lambert is the manager of Student & Educator Services for the BEC, responsible for cultivating internship opportunities through the development of business partnerships. Stephanie's path to the BEC included both business and education experience. After working in various roles for International Gaming Technology, Stephanie pursued a teaching degree. She put her business and marketing background to use during her career as a marketing educator for Everett Public Schools where she developed internships and volunteer opportunities for her students with local businesses. Her passion to make learning real in her classroom led her to the BEC after relocating to the Portland area. Stephanie can be reached at slambert@becpdx.org.