CASE STUDY:  BD Displays

The Company: Brilliant Technology for Miniature Displays
BD Displays was founded by Dr. Michael Bass and Dr. Dennis Deppe, both faculty within the Center for Research and Education in Optics and Lasers (CREOL), which is a research center at the University of Central Florida. The two founders had conducted independent research which, when combined, could be the foundation for a broad range of next generation micro-display technologies. The two researchers decided to co-found a spin-out company in the hopes of attracting SBIR grant dollars to fund the maturation of their research into next-generation display technology that would be relevant in a range of commercial applications.

Due to the innovative research that was the foundation of BD Displays, the company was awarded a Phase I SBIR grant from the National Science Foundation (NSF). Shortly thereafter, BD Displays was invited to apply for a $1M Phase II award that would help fund further maturation of their display technologies. A key part of the criteria for being awarded a Phase II grant is to provide NSF with an extensive plan for commercializing the product that is developed with the awarded funding. This plan is comparable to a standard business plan, and BD Display’s team had never created this sort of plan before and were very concerned that they would not win the award without guidance on how to create the commercialization plan.

The Venture Lab: Taking Great Technology Off the Bench and Into the Market
To get started, the Venture Team assigned a coach and two interns (MBA and Engineering PhD student) to BD Displays. This team met several times with Dr. Bass and Dr. Deppe to understand the unique science behind the displays. During these sessions, it became clear that there were many potential markets, and that the science could be enhanced to address even more market opportunities. The problem quickly became an issue of determining which market to start with, and how to plan for strategically addressing additional markets over time in a profitable manner.

The Venture Lab’s student team, with guidance from Venture Lab coaches, dedicated themselves to the task of sizing out different markets, and to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of competing technologies and companies in the most promising markets. This effort was intense, and took several months to complete the research. After many iterations, some initial conclusions were made on how to address the range of market opportunities, and the appropriate order to address them in.

The Venture Lab team took this research, and used it to create a detailed commercialization plan that ultimately was included in the SBIR Phase II NSF proposal for BD Displays. While NSF is still finalizing their decision on funding DB Displays, they specifically noted that the commercialization plan for BD Display’s was one of the best they had seen. The effort had paid off, and it looks promising that BD Displays will be awarded this funding.

A Word from the CEO
“The expertise of the Venture Lab team with respect to business planning and market research is excellent. The student interns are top notch, and their mentorship by the Venture Lab coaches resulted in a fantastic resource for BD Displays. In addition to obtaining a professional commercialization plan for NSF, we learned a lot, and will definitely use their services in future proposals.”

~ Dr. Michael Bass, BD Displays’ Founder & CEO