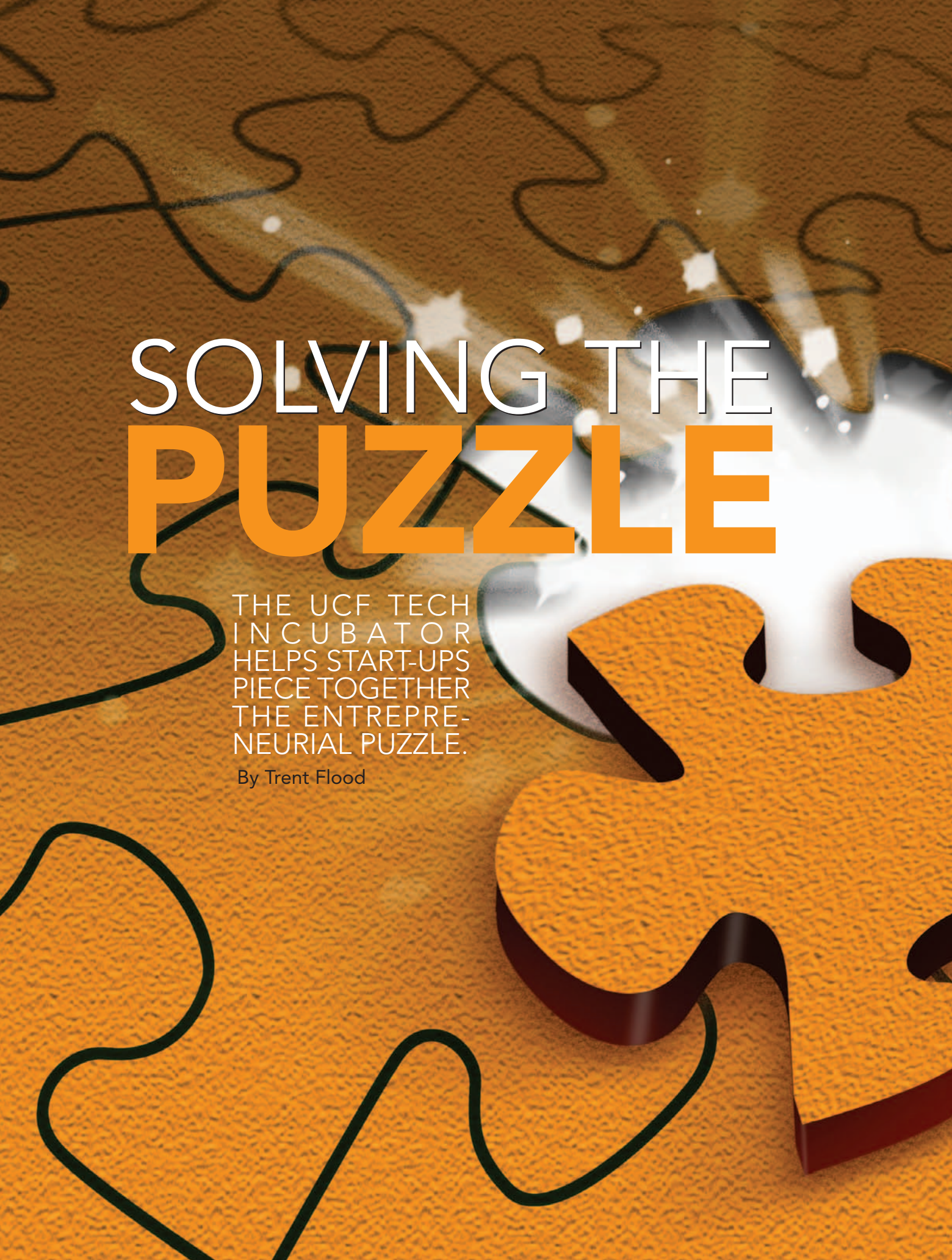

SOLVING THE PUZZLE

THE UCF TECH INCUBATOR HELPS START-UPS PIECE TOGETHER THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PUZZLE.

By Trent Flood

Walk into any toy store in America, go to the games aisle and pick up one of the many puzzle boxes you find there. Now, open it and dump the pieces the floor. The mess you are now looking at is an accurate representation of what entrepreneurs face when starting a business. The challenge: take all of those pieces and turn them into a picture of success. In Metro Orlando, technology entrepreneurs don't have to face this challenge alone, thanks to the University of Central Florida's (UCF) Technology Incubator.

Opened in October 1999, the Incubator is a perfect example of a university-led community partnership that is making a big economic impact. That partnership includes UCF, Orange County, the City of Orlando, the Florida High Tech Corridor Council, and the Metro Orlando Economic Development Commission. Additionally, there are dozens of professional service providers and experienced entrepreneurs that contribute significantly to the services and resources necessary to this program.

"Good entrepreneurs know that starting a business takes a strong resolve and recognition that you don't know everything," says Tom O'Neal, chief executive officer for the UCF Technology Incubator. "Just having a good idea isn't enough. You need a solid business plan, access to capital, legal and accounting assistance. Thanks to the extensive support we have from our community partners and the University, we can help companies through all of this, which leads to a much higher survival rate for these small businesses."

While this idea isn't new, the tremendous success of the Orlando facility, located in the Central Florida Research Park, is impressive. Since opening, the Incubator has grown to more than 62,000 square feet of space, with 48 current clients, 14 graduates, and recognition by the National Business Incubation Association (NBIA) as the 2004 Incubator of the Year. One of the Incubator's clients, Cognoscenti Health Institute, was also named NBIA's 2004 Technology Incubator Client of the Year. Not bad for a "start-up."

However, O'Neal thinks the Incubator's success should really be measured through the success of its client companies and the resulting 630 new jobs earning average wages of nearly $61,000. Here are a few examples that highlight how the UCF Technology Incubator is helping entrepreneurs sort out their business puzzles.

A SUCCESSFUL LAUNCH

In 1999, UCF industrial engineering professor Dr. Mansooreh Mollaghasemi was given a grant by NASA to evaluate how it processes a space shuttle from start-up to launch. Using historical data, Mollaghasemi built a software system that spit out results almost perfectly in line with how past shuttle ground operations had actually occurred.

That project led Mollaghasemi to consider other uses for her modeling software. It also led to her commercialization of that technology and establishment of a new company, **Productivity Apex, Inc.** (www.productivityapex.com). After going it on her own for a couple of years, Mollaghasemi recognizes that she could use some help from the UCF Technology Incubator to take her company to the next level.

"The Incubator has provided us with assistance in two main areas," says Mollaghasemi. "First, it has provided us with connections to people who are important to the growth of our business. Second, it has helped us gain legitimacy as a company, due to its reputation in the community and at the University."

That growing reputation has led to

some very interesting projects for Productivity Apex, including work with the Department of Transportation, Orlando International Airport, Duracell, Lockheed and Siemens Westinghouse. In fact, the company's modeling software has proven that it can be adapted to any number of complex systems, assisting in their optimization.

This work can seem complicated, but if you ask Mollaghasemi it's all pretty straightforward: "As an engineer, I want to solve problems."

The Incubator is helping her and her company to do just that.

IN PERFECT ALIGNMENT

Imagine that you are a leading IT vendor working with a CIO who can't get budget approval for a project you both believe to be worthwhile. A daunting task for almost any technology executive — until now.

Incubator alumna **Alinean** (www.alinean.com) has developed research and analysis products that quantify the cost-benefits of IT projects, and measure the value of these investments. Their tools have been custom developed for most IT solutions, including servers, operating systems, security, database management, business intelligence, content and document management, asset management and office automation.

> **"The Incubator is a center of gravity** — attracting an ecosystem of functions required to support a small business."
>
> ***— Martin Suter, Cohda Wireless***

"The Incubator's role was invaluable to Alinean's inception and initial growth," says Tom Pisello, a long-time Orlando entrepreneur and company founder. "By providing us with the freedom to focus on securing clients, without the pressure of managing facilities and infrastructure, and raising outside capital, the company was allowed to mature far more quickly than would have been [otherwise] possible."

Today, Alinean counts Hewlett Packard, IBM, Oracle, SAP, Microsoft, Citigroup and FedEx among its many clients. The future is certainly bright for this company, which graduated from the Incubator two years ago.

Bill Johnston, the company's president, puts it this way: "Alinean has established a reputation as the IT Business Value Selling Expert. Our growth plans are robust, and we'll continue to evolve in response to our customers' needs."

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

Sometimes a bad situation can turn into a great new opportunity. This was certainly true for two former employees of Agere Systems' Orlando office, who lost their jobs due to the company's business realignment plans.

Brenda Prenitzer and Jennifer McKinley had worked at Agere for several years, and had gained tremendous experience with microanalysis. When Agere announced the closure of its Orlando plant, these two scientists got together and began considering plans for a new company based on prior experiences and their relationship with UCF.

In January 2003, these plans came together in the form of **NanoSpective** (www.nanospective.com), an Incubator client company that evaluates the atomic structure and composition of materials. This high-tech work has led down an interesting path.

"When I was working at Agere, I had to deal with a legal case related to intellectual property," says Prenitzer. "Companies like Agere have lots of revenue at stake in these kinds of situations, and we recognized the potential of using microscopes in the legal process. This allows most cases to settle out of court because they have proof in hand. We give them the 'smoking gun'."

The Incubator has played a critical role in both assisting with the formation of the company and with helping Prenitzer, McKinley and their two other founding partners work out the details of an agreement with UCF to use their Materials Characterization Lab.

Prenitzer adds, "Part of marketing is perception, and our ability to have a Central Florida Research Park address is of tremendous value. The Incubator has also helped us with strategic planning, helped us analyze strategic alliances, and provided networking opportunities."

MAKING THE CONNECTION

Lay over in any major airport in the country and you will quickly realize how important wireless connectivity has become to the U.S. population. Unfortunately, today's WiFi and WiMAX standards do not address the harshest radio frequency (RF) environments, such as providing broadband connection to a moving vehicle.

That is the niche that Australian-firm **Cohda Wireless** (www.cohdawireless.com) is looking to fill. First developed at the Institute for Telecommunications Research at the University of South Australia, Cohda's technology is especially relevant to first responders. Recognition of that fact led the company to consider the North American market, where municipalities have some of the largest public safety budgets in the world.

Enter Orlando technology executive Martin Suter, who had recently left Maitland-based MeshNetworks, Inc., which was acquired by Motorola. Suter wanted to start a new venture in Metro Orlando and found Cohda while doing research on the Internet. It was a match made in heaven. Cohda Wireless opened its first U.S. office in the UCF Incubator last fall.

When asked why he chose to open Cohda in the Incubator, Suter says, "The Incubator is a center of gravity — attracting an ecosystem of functions required to support a small business. If we opened this office in the Orlando market without their assistance, it would take considerable more time and effort to make this company a success."