

EDUCATION, TRAINING AND INVESTMENT

Coding Schools Offer Quick Access to Tech Talent

If you're looking for a career change or know a traditional college route isn't for you, wouldn't you want the option of a quality education that prepares you to be fully employed in as little as three months?

Sounds like it's too good to be true, but that's what coding schools – an emerging solution at the crossroads of education and technology – are promising to potential tech workers.

John Qualls, president of the Fishers-based Eleven Fifty Academy, explains that coding schools are born out of a need for talented coders.

"We got started in (local tech entrepreneur) Scott Jones' mansion. He couldn't find talent and came across this boot camp model being done on the coast and said, 'Why don't we have that here?' The biggest challenge is finding talent. It doesn't allow (companies) to be as nimble to iterate and be successful in the market," he relays.

Typically, "boot camp" coding schools offer 12-week immersive courses that churn out employable computer programmers. A recent *Wall Street Journal* article highlights how the number of graduates of coding schools has climbed from less than 5,000 in 2013 to nearly 20,000 in 2016. The article cites an average coding school tuition of \$11,450.

Qualls says Eleven Fifty Academy is unique as it is a non-profit organization and one of only two non-profit coding schools in the country.

The *Wall Street Journal* also reported that there are more than 90 coding schools nationally, but there are signs of sustainability issues. Leaders of two coding schools – Dev Bootcamp in Chicago and Iron Yard, with 15 campuses (including one in Indianapolis) – announced in July they would be shutting down those operations later this year.

Qualls recommends students "do your homework" to determine a program's quality.

"How do you hold them accountable? Graduation rates, placement rates, things like that," he suggests.

The Council on Integrity in Results Reporting (CIRR) was formed to hold organizations accountable in reporting those statistics. Eleven Fifty Academy is on the board of that organization.

Qualls compares compensation for Eleven Fifty Academy graduates to those earning four-year degrees.

"The average starting salary (for our graduates) is approaching \$50,000. The average starting salary of a four-year grad is between \$40,000 and \$60,000. This creates you in 12 weeks. We're not anti-higher education. This is an alternative to college for some," he emphasizes. "But you don't have to do four years and \$96,000 to do a shift. This is a pretty efficient way of doing it."



Coding schools – typically 12-week "boot camp"-style immersive learning experiences – are helping employers fill talent gaps quickly and giving young students and career changers viable workforce opportunities.

RESOURCE: John Qualls, Eleven Fifty Academy, at www.elevenfifty.org

Curvo Labs Continues Its Growth

A recent venture capital round of \$900,000 has put Evansville-based Curvo Labs over the \$2 million mark in funding since its 2012 founding.

The company develops software for hospital supply chain management to enable smarter workflow and automation for hospital customers.

Co-founder and CEO Andy Perry explains the company has grown steadily since 2015. Previous funding rounds – including a 2013 grant for \$50,000 from the Indiana Community Development Fund, managed by Elevate Ventures – have enabled company leaders to focus on developing software and attracting customers.

"We had really strong growth through 2015 and 2016 and needed to keep building on that," Perry affirms. "We are executing the next phase and are fortunate to have really good investors to not only help with capital, but help with running a company and doing good things for customers."

"We've been really fortunate; we haven't had to take the eye off the ball of building product to do fundraising. That has been extremely supportive."

Perry highlights Kent Parker (featured in *BizVoice*® in July-August 2014), founder and CEO of Snake Run Capital and leader of the most recent round of funding, as well as Bob Myer of Elevate Ventures and others as not only investors, but advisors for Curvo Labs.

"You're able to build the competencies and team of your company if you raise money the right way with the right folks," he says. "I think you're much better off if you build a relationship with individuals from whom you're taking investment."

Perry also points to the state's influence in enabling companies such as Curvo Labs to connect with investors and venture capital funds.

"We found Indiana to be a pretty friendly place to raise capital for an early tech company like us," he offers. "We are thankful and fortunate to be in Indiana. It's been a great place to do what we've done."

RESOURCE: Andy Perry, Curvo Labs, at www.curvolabs.com

Farmers Taking to the Skies With Drone Pilot Program

Up, up and away over the farms of Indiana is where Beck's Hybrids and Indiana State University (ISU) are taking unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) – or drones – through a partnership to train pilots.

When farmers have a real-time picture of what their fields look like, they're better able to target fertilizer or herbicide or check for animal, insect or storm damage. Hoosier farms can run more efficiently and more profitably with less crop loss.

As the first university in the state to offer a degree program in drones, ISU is a natural partner for Beck's, says Jim Love, light robotic manager at the Atlanta, Indiana-based seed company.

"Our goal is to make our customers successful and to help them access the latest technology, whether that's seed related or another ag-related technology to help them make more money," he remarks.

ISU's Center for Unmanned Systems and Human Capital Development was authorized in 2015 by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to fly the UAV at the Terre Haute International Airport-Hulman Field and Muscatatuck Urban Training Center in Jennings County.

The ISU-directed course is two days. Love explains that about 60 people have been trained through the program so far during three courses last winter, when it's easier for farmers to carve out time for education. That will be the case for the coming season as well, he adds.

"(ISU) has a really well-known aviation



Beck's Hybrids and Indiana State University are partnering to train and certify Hoosier farmers to pilot unmanned aerial vehicles, otherwise known as drones.

school. We have enjoyed our partnership with them," he notes. "We even let competitors participate (in the pilot training). We want to stewardship good use of this technology. If our guys are following the rules and somebody else isn't, we're out of luck."

Beck's started working with drones in 2014, Love says. The company has been doing aerial imagery since the 1990s, but those images weren't in real time and often unreliable for helping farmers diagnose and solve issues early.

A change in federal rules on UAV certification was part of the impetus behind the program.

"(The FAA) came up with the Part 107

certification and it basically finally differentiated between all drones and small drones and that was holding everything up," Love says. "Everything under 55 pounds is going to be considered a small drone and it will fall under the 107 rule. You have to keep it in sight, below 400 feet and stay away from airports."

Love hopes that continued acceptance of drone technology will happen over time, but that it is becoming more commonplace.

"What's interesting – if you try to pigeon-hole who is the most common drone user, it's impossible. On one farm, it'll be some guy who's 19 and I've had guys who are in their early 80s who are all jacked up about them," he concludes.

RESOURCE: Jim Love, Beck's Hybrids, at www.beckshybrids.com