

Second Stage Extra

In need of master's-level talent, Gongos teams up to help create it

By Dustin Walsh



Camille Nicita
Principal, Research Groups
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For Auburn Hills custom marketing research firm **Gongos Research Inc.**, finding the right talent to bring aboard is one of the greatest challenges. But a new effort could fill the talent pool with homegrown researchers. In March, the CEO of Troy-based marketing research firm **Ducker Worldwide** contacted Gongos to help create a new master's of market research program at **Michigan State University's Eli Broad College of Business and Graduate School of Management**. The marketing research industry is growing, generating \$19.2 billion globally in 2003 and more than \$32 billion in 2008, according to the Amsterdam-based **European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research**. And as the industry grows, so does Gongos, going from 77 employees to 100 in the past two months and from revenue of \$13.2 million last year to a projected \$16.9 million this year. But finding master's-level talent in the area has been nearly impossible for Gongos.

“Marketing research has always been seen as a background discipline,” said Camille Nicita, principal at Gongos and head of the company's recruitment efforts. “People have been coming in with marketing degrees or social science degrees but lack the project management and relationship-building skills we look for.”

Patrick Glaser, director of research standards at the Glastonbury, Conn.-based **Marketing Research Association**, concurs.

“There are only a few schools that teach this at the master's level,” he said. “This is one of the major bottlenecks.”

The **University of Georgia's Terry College of Business** offers a master's degree in marketing research — one of the few in the country and a frequent recruiting ground for Gongos.

But with so few programs, every firm goes after the same students, Nicita said. A local program like the one at MSU allows

local firms to not only help create new talent but access it as well. “We're shaping the curriculum for the students,” Nicita said. “The idea came about out of sheer frustration from the marketplace. We've been disappointed by the curriculum in other programs, and now we can produce the right type of people coming out of a local program.”

The one-year master of science in marketing research program will commence in the winter semester of 2011, with all classes being taught in East Lansing.

The program will feature a full year of classes, concurrent with two paid internships at firms such as Gongos, Ducker and Fenton, Mo.-based **Maritz Inc.**, which has an automotive research office in Southfield.

The program will leverage existing graduate courses and faculty from MSU's marketing department and incorporate new curriculum designed by the marketing research firms. Nicita will act as an adviser and guest lecturer. John Gongos, president and CEO, will also be a guest lecturer.

The first students — most are employees of the three firms — will be sponsored by their respective employers, Nicita said. University officials are also courting potential students from undergrad programs.

The Market Research Association will attempt to address the education issue at its annual conference, June 9-11 in Boston. The association also will put together an academic board in hopes of sparking more interest in marketing research programs at other universities.

Glaser said there's a growing connection between business and academia, and more industries are looking to capitalize on opportunities to mold new talent as the lines blur.

The **Wayne State University School of Business Administration Career Planning Placement Office** Stephen Strome, former chairman and CEO of **Handleman Co.** and executive in residence at the business school, will lead the organization of the board. The **Wayne State University School of Business Administration Career Planning Placement Office** plans to organize an executive advisory board this summer, said Amber Conway, director of the office. Stephen Strome, former chairman and CEO of **Handleman Co.** and executive in residence at the business school, will lead the organization of the board.

“I think for the first time universities are really starting to think about the output of the students and are starting to think about accountability of their programs,” Conway said. “We're all looking to develop programs that employees say they need and become more proactive.”

Daryl Weinert, executive director of the Business Engagement Center at the **University of Michigan**, said the university has executive advisory boards to keep existing programs current with trends.

“We're more engaged with industry than we ever have been,” he said. “This type of partnership is happening more and more.” Most universities offer certificate programs to address current needs, he said. **Lawrence Technological University** recently partnered with Waltham, Mass.-based **Raytheon Co.**'s Troy office to develop a certificate in manufacturing systems for the defense industry. The first courses began in January.

“Companies want to hire students that already have the knowledge,” Conway said. “What our local employers want to see is now becoming more of the conversation.”

Nicita said program partnerships are key to stopping up the brain drain.

“We've been really successful here in Michigan, and we'd much rather hire here in our state and build upon the talent here,” she said. “Participating in a program where we can show students that they can make a difference in Michigan with their skills is something we hold dear.”