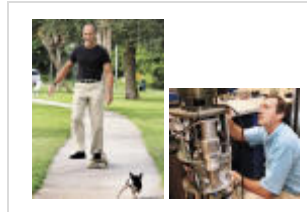


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No lines, no waiting: Voda LLC is where SRI-St. Petersburg will be

Tampa Bay Business Journal - by [Jane Meinhardt](#) Staff Writer



ST. PETERSBURG — A mini-SRI International sprouting in the St. Petersburg shadow of the Silicon Valley research firm has licensed technology from the **University of South Florida**, gathered private investors and has revenue of about \$750,000 in less than a year.

Voda LLC was founded to commercialize developments by David Fries, one of the original members of the **Center for Ocean Technology** at USF, and associates at the **EcoSystems Technology Group** at the **USF College of Marine Science**.

In the past eight years, Fries has licensed 12 different technologies for independent outside companies or spinoffs he started. He is co-founder of **Intelligent MicroPatterning LLC** in St. Petersburg and creator of USF's MEMS program.

Voda specializes in outdoor sensor networks primarily used for environmental monitoring for markets that include government, research, consumer-based businesses and the security industry.

“We are looking for collaboration locally, nationally and globally,” said Fries, who is Voda's CEO and chief technology officer. “We see ourselves as a company that can participate in local situations with advanced environmental technology as well as a global company.”

The company has eight employees as well as subcontractors around Pinellas County.

Stayed put

Voda has agreements for sales with value-added businesses that have their own employees, said James Wilson, COO. He, Fries and several other employees were not among the 40 or so USF researchers that migrated to SRI-St.Petersburg last year.

SRI received \$30 million in public incentives to establish a center in St. Petersburg next to the College of Marine Science on property donated by the city.

“We broke out on our own and picked up this technology with private investment,” Wilson said. “We’re committed to staying in St. Petersburg and building a business. We’ve already exceeded our business plan.”

Voda’s multisensor systems measure conductivity, temperature, pressure, chemicals and other aquatic variables using an inexpensive printed circuit board. The company developed packaging and communication technology for its networks involving Wi-Fi on the water that is tied to cameras whose images can be communicated to shore side stations, providing real-time glimpses of underwater environments.

Leisure lucrative

In addition to compliance monitoring, scientific, security and other markets, Fries thinks the leisure market — mainly coastal resorts — is a good prospect.

“The system pipes images into hotels where they can see what’s happening real-time off their coast,” he said. “Hotel chains can use it for marketing.”

Voda has two systems on order and built one for a business in the oil industry. A basic multisensor system sold straight to a client costs about \$130,000.

Fries created Voda mainly out of necessity. Grant money has become hard to get. He has been landing one in seven grants he seeks instead of one in three. State money is scarce to non-existent.

“Voda is a spinoff to meet the need for outside funding, to move beyond financial restrictions,” Fries said. “I wanted to diversify funding streams and provide an opportunity to work in private industry. We’ve been approached by angel investors and private equity groups.”

Michelle Bauer, former executive director of the **Tampa Bay Technology Forum**, described Fries as “a poster child for how technology transfer needs to be done.”

“He is an entrepreneurial researcher who knows how to get licensed and the risk involved in getting technology into practical use,” Bauer said. “He is also capable of finding other investors among people he has his own connection to. He represents a new generation of entrepreneurial professors.”