

Case study: Direct Dimensions Inc.

Direct Dimensions is one of the country's oldest 3-D scanning and modeling service bureaus. Founded by Michael Raphael in 1995, the Owings Mills, Maryland-based company has grown to 25 employees and more than \$3 million in annual revenue. In 2014 Raphael entered the Maryland Economic Development Accelerator, which enabled him to work with the National Center for Economic Gardening's National Strategic Research Team (NSRT).

One of Raphael's greatest takeaways from his Economic Gardening engagement was an extensive list of companies to use in customer prospecting.

In contrast to competitors that only focus on one or two vertical markets, Direct Dimensions serves a diverse group of industries that range from advanced manufacturing to medical prosthetics to the movie business. (Among the company's film credits are "Noah," "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," "The Amazing Spider-Man 2" and "Birdman.") Yet having such a broad customer base makes it difficult to take a strategic approach to business development, Raphael says.

After receiving information from Raphael about his clientele, the NSRT produced detailed spreadsheets (one file was 30 MB in size) that listed customers and potential clients in industrial, museum and movie industries — along with various parameters such as NAICS and SIC codes, geographic location, number of employees and sales volume. "This was extremely valuable," Raphael says. "I'm able to easily sort the lists and target new customers based who we currently serve."

The research team also showed Raphael how to use social media tool, such as LinkedIn, to find the right contacts to pitch to within the companies. "This is especially important in the movie business because it is difficult to advertise to film companies," Raphael observes. "It's an industry that works almost completely on referrals."

"Granted, there are subscription services and consultants I could have worked with to get similar lists, but it probably would have been extremely expensive — and not happened so quickly," Raphael says. "To have these resources drop in my lap is a real opportunity. What's more, it's information that is not going to time out. This should be viable for at least the next two or three years."

"The Economic Gardening engagement was very relevant because it was so customized," Raphael adds. "I've participated in some group events on business development that were very rote and ended up being a waste of my time. In contrast, Economic Gardening didn't take that much of my time — and yet I got huge returns."



Michael Raphael, founder of Direct Dimensions Inc.