



Leading the Way from Thought to Action

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Middlebury Solutions Group (MSG) at Middlebury College

The Middlebury Solutions Group (MSG), the centerpiece of the competitive strategy course taught Middlebury College Professor Michael Claudon each fall and spring, accelerates early-stage Vermont ventures' time-to-capital, time-to-market and time-to-job-creation. Guided by Claudon and volunteer mentors, undergraduate consultants learn while they deliver critical company-building services to the founders of MSG's Vermont-based clients.

Since its launch in 2002, MSG teams have completed engagements with 44 Vermont-based startups. Thirty-five of these former clients are currently funded and operating as of spring 2008.

MSG client services

1. Describe, identify, define, model and quantify a compelling path to profitability and strategies for building and sustaining competitive advantage
 - Identify, articulate and understand
 - The need the venture meets
 - The target customer
 - How is the need currently being met, at what cost and through what distribution channels
 - The typical business models in this space
 - Who is benefiting and who is paying
 - The venture's success factors for and risks
 - Critical management skill and experience requirements
 - Build business and financial models specific to the client's business and market
 - Deliver cost, revenue and net income projections for one and five years
 - Define and fully understand the value/supply chain, including assessing relative power positions of the players along it
 - Conduct a detailed assessment of the substitution and entry threats, and rivalry among incumbents; including developing recommendations around dealing with them
 - Conduct market size accessibility research
 - How big is the initial and eventual market?
 - Which is the right segment now? In the future?
 - Where are the price points?
 - What is the correct pricing model?
 - Identify/evaluate distribution channels/options
2. Prepare and present to the client and participating investors at the MSG Entrepreneur's Forum
 - A compelling, PowerPoint-driven pitch to investors
 - A final engagement report covering the items above that includes specific, actionable, and time-sequenced recommendations

Vermont beneficiaries

- **Founders of early-stage MSG clients:** Through their intense, term-long interaction with MSG teams, founders become better informed around true nature and dimensions of the opportunity before them, and how best to take advantage of that opportunity. MSG clients therefore walk away from the process having significantly reduced time-to-capital, time-to-market and time-to-job-creation.
- **Vermont entrepreneurs:** By participating in the forum and workshops that culminate each term's course, and particularly by interacting with the MSG students and seasoned professionals who have been through the process, fledgling entrepreneurs begin building networks among fellow their peers as well as among venture consultants and investors.
- **Angel and institutional investors:** Identifying fundable projects is an investor's never-ending challenge. MSG works with Vermont-based venture consultants, venture network groups, and investors to help them identify investment-worthy startups.
- **Vermont community and economy:** Most jobs are generated by small and medium enterprises. By facilitating the development and eventual funding and operation of new enterprises, the MSG service contributes to growing Vermont's jobs, incomes, and tax revenues.

For further information, contact

Michael P. Claudon, Professor of Economics and Director, DigitalBridges2.0
DKE Alumni House
Middlebury College
Middlebury, VT 05753
Tel 802.443.5799
Cell 802.734.1019
Email Claudon@middlebury.edu

And

MariAnn Osborne, Program Director, DigitalBridges2.0
DKE Alumni House
Middlebury College
Middlebury, VT 05753
Tel 802.443.5435
Email Mosborne@middlebury.edu