

# Intern Excellence

By Charlee Beasor

Rook Consulting integrates interns into the company to help manage growth while also providing the students with valuable workplace skills.



## Rook Consulting Manages Growth While Cultivating Talent

Time and again, employers across Indiana report trouble finding appropriately-skilled people to fill their workforces. Typically, industrial or manufacturing jobs are highlighted as main casualties of this skills gap.

But another piece to the Hoosier workforce puzzle is the oft-mentioned “brain drain.” Graduates are leaving the state after college for different locales, namely the coasts. It is of major concern for specialized industries, including those, for example, in information technology (IT) and high-tech disciplines.

Rook Consulting, which provides IT security solutions and is based in San Jose, Calif. and Indianapolis, struggled to access necessary talent here to support skyrocketing growth (almost 800% since 2011). In response, Rook began growing and cultivating its own pipeline of potential employees by utilizing university interns.

Marketing manager Mitch Walker explains that interns are a part of that success for the company, which was created in 2008 and totals 25 employees locally. The company celebrated hiring its 25th intern in July.

“(Interns) have played an important role and at that growth rate, it’s been very difficult to plan far ahead. To bring in an experienced hire, it takes months. So to bring in an intern, it’s a faster cycle. It’s easier, we can bring in several and it’s a little simpler process,” Walker notes. “Most of the people we have here started as an intern. It’s a big part of sustaining that growth and helping people along the way.”

Walker was an intern at Rook before being hired full-time in 2011. Three current Rook employees are former interns and three more have accepted job offers upon graduation.

Interns typically work 20 to 30 hours per week.

“Our interns, really kind of for a lack of a better term, get thrown into the deep end. There are training guides and lots of people to ask questions and guide them, but we really lean on our interns a lot; they are expected to perform,” he says. “It’s been amazing to see how nearly all of them have met those standards – risen to the challenge, and it’s great to see that.”

Putting interns into those types of high-pressure training situations helps to unlock some inner abilities.

“With the method that we use, it’s definitely a training/confidence level. We’ve found at times there is something they don’t know (how to approach) and other times, it’s something they know (how to handle) but they’re not confident enough to go out and act on it,” Walker shares.

Finding a balance between giving interns the space to figure things out on their own and making sure they don’t completely fail is vital, he asserts.

“We don’t want them to fall on their faces; we have to make sure they’re protected from that,” he stresses. “In general, most of the interns have done great. They’ve definitely lacked that sheer experience and career readiness, and I like to think that our intern program really provides that.”

**RESOURCE:** Mitch Walker, Rook Consulting, at [www.rookconsulting.com](http://www.rookconsulting.com)

## Indiana INTERNnet Focuses on Regional Partnerships

Indiana INTERNnet – the free online internship matching service for students, employers and career counselors managed by the Indiana Chamber – continues to grow in its 12th year.

A recent focus for the organization has been on leveraging regional partnerships and opportunities available around the state.

“Part of what we want to do is work on banding together to get regional employers, high schools and colleges in the same room,” offers Janet Boston, executive director of Indiana INTERNnet. “Getting to both ends of the pipeline further highlights our state’s workforce challenges and the potential solutions that could exist through utilizing these available resources.”

Indiana INTERNnet has been working with the Northeast Indiana Graduate Retention Program (GRP) of Greater Fort Wayne Inc. for a decade. That partnership enables education and industry to create a workforce prepared for the needs of local employers. Other partnerships include the Center of Workforce Innovations in Northwest Indiana and its READY NWI, as well as the Intern SJC program through the St. Joseph County Chamber of Commerce and 13 high schools and colleges in the area.

Updates to the Indiana INTERNnet web site, [indianaintern.net](http://indianaintern.net), will highlight these regional initiatives and offer more information on individual region pages to make it easier for students to find colleges or universities in their area.

Additionally, the EARN (Employment Aid Readiness Network) Indiana program continues to offer matching funds to organizations that employ eligible students in approved internships. EARN Indiana essentially revamped the previous work-study program in Indiana. Employers can receive up to 50% matching funds for qualified internships.

Funding was opened up to for-profit companies in the fall for the first time; previously, only non-profit corporations and universities were eligible for funding. EARN Indiana internships are matched only through Indiana INTERNnet.

**RESOURCE:** Janet Boston, Indiana INTERNnet, at [www.indianaintern.net](http://www.indianaintern.net)

## Ativio Offers International Experience to Students

Sometimes the power will suddenly go out in India. In Botswana, Africa, you have a little more notice, as neighborhood blackouts are typically planned events.

Alternatively, cultural differences can result in a whole team of people not showing up for a meeting that's been scheduled for three weeks. But they're on the other side of the globe and you can't fly there to fix the issue.

These are just some of the challenges that businesses face when dealing internationally.

Students at Purdue University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology and Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis – as well as seasoned dislocated workers through EmployIndy – are learning such intricacies of international business here at home. This is made possible by the Global Center of Innovation (GCi) program via information technology consulting company Ativio.

Ativio CEO Chris Riester explains the difficulty the company has had in attaining software developers with the right skills in Indiana, particularly those with global experience. The company has 80 employees throughout its offices in India, Botswana and Indianapolis.

"About three years ago now, we needed some software developers to hire into our company and we couldn't find any here in Indianapolis. We had a job posting out there for well over three

months, which is way too long to wait," he recalls. "If I was to put the job posting in India, we'd have a hundred resumés a day. We saw there was a problem."

He affirms that Ativio could have recruited international employees for the positions, but decided to see if it could fix the problem here.

"We wanted to see if we could do something to train up individuals here in Indiana to kind of flood the market with people that had the knowledge and skills needed to work within the IT company departments. One thing we knew we could bring to the table is international experience. That is something that we found not many college students had," Riester acknowledges.

GCi is a project-based class enabling students to team with others at universities in India and Botswana.

"It was more to do about communication and team building than with the project. The project wasn't weighted as high as involvement, experiential learning, showing up for their meetings and being involved. ... They learned about the cultures, different infrastructures ..." he outlines.

"We show them all the obstacles you can run into, how to get around them using technology and the team structure to overcome that."

Within the GCi division of the company, Riester adds, "We go out and try to get students internships and so in those internships they work –

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## Ativio

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they might be all domestic, some of them are international teams.”

Over 1,000 students have taken the course over the past three years and Ativio has spent one million dollars to facilitate the program, he notes.

While Ativio has used various interns throughout the company, one was hired specifically out of the EmployIndy course. Helping students obtain the differentiating experience is a big plus, Riester says.

“Several have called back and said it helped them get their job. I’ve gone up to Purdue and done interviews where there are 13 in a day and no matter what the field, everyone took the same classes. It’s a different face, same resumé, over and over,” he laments. “But the feedback is that this (GCi) was a class that employers really focused in on and really got the conversation going that separated them from the competition.”

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**RESOURCE:** Chris Riester, Ativio, at [www.ativio.com](http://www.ativio.com)