



**Entrepreneurial  
Training & Consulting**

**Ann Arbor Company is an “Engine” for**

## **Growth**

Last month, BBCetc client, Genomenon, a leading genomic research company, was honored with a [Best of Show](#) award at the Bio-IT World Conference & Expo in Boston. The prestigious award recognizes the best of innovative life sciences industry product solutions, in this case Genomenon’s [Mastermind Genomic Search Engine](#). A panel of experts from academia, industry, pharma and biotech, bases their judgement on uniqueness, importance to the industry, and the ability to offer a compelling return on investment.

According to the Genomenon website, “Mastermind accelerates variant interpretation with immediate insight into the full text of millions of scientific articles allowing users to prioritize your search results by clinical relevance and find what they are looking for 5-10 times faster.”

Based in Ann Arbor, Genomenon was formed out of the University of Michigan in 2014 with an eye toward solving the time-consuming, error-prone, manual process of searching and curating a growing body of medical literature for disease-related genes and variants. Its software assists organizations doing work in the genomics field in identifying genetic cancers and non-cancer genetic diseases helping clinicians make informed diagnoses, the pharma industry optimize drug discovery, and the life sciences perform impactful genomic research. In its short lifetime, Genomenon has already garnered nearly 3,000 clinical users worldwide.

How did SBIR figure into Genomenon’s success? According to Genomenon Co-founder, Mark Kiel, MD, PhD, the company received some early funding from angel investors and VCs, but, he says, “That was needful, but it wasn’t enough funding to allow us to get off the ground completely, so we applied for an NIH SBIR Fast-Track grant through the NHGRI (the National Human Genome Research Institute).”

“BBC initially discouraged us on the Fast-Track because it was a new mechanism and considered a long shot, but we decided to go for it and once we did, the BBC was with us all the way. Kris Bergman was my ‘guardian angel’ getting us through all the documentation, forms and accreditation requirements,” he said, “and Mike (Kurek, a former BBC consultant) gave me important perspective about the grantsmanship involved in SBIR applications.”

Genomenon was awarded \$1.8 million in April 2017 and recently received a Notice of Award on a Phase I proposal from NHGRI as well.

“I view SBIR as a trampoline, not a safety net” Kiel says. “We used it to help propel us forward to do things like expanded technical development and hiring that might not have been possible otherwise. Just going through the grant writing and application process forces you to examine and justify all aspects of your project and business and prove you can take your product all the way to market. It was an excellent exercise for our company and for me as a first-time CEO.”

Kiel had advice to those new to the SBIR Process:

- Plan ahead and stick to a timeline. Ideally, you'll be able to have the confidence to submit your proposal 1-2 weeks ahead of time and use the buffer to plan for any hiccups.
- Think carefully about why you are writing the grant beyond just the technological aspects. Consider who will be reviewing it and how they will approach its assessment and plan accordingly.
- If you are not testing and proving something in the scientific portion of your grant, you shouldn't be submitting an SBIR.
- If you have colleagues who have been through the entire SBIR process before, they can be invaluable resources – even if it is in a completely different scientific field. Ask for their advice. Have them read your proposal or share theirs with you and ask them to challenge you on any weak points of your application.
- Talk to your NIH Program Official. They can help confirm that you are on the right track with your application. Be respectful of their time. They are there to help but are busy and don't owe you anything!
- Keep supportive people up to date on your progress. Make them feel they are part of your team. You will be glad you did.

For more information about Genomenon, visit <https://www.genomenon.com/> or email [hello@genomenon.com](mailto:hello@genomenon.com)