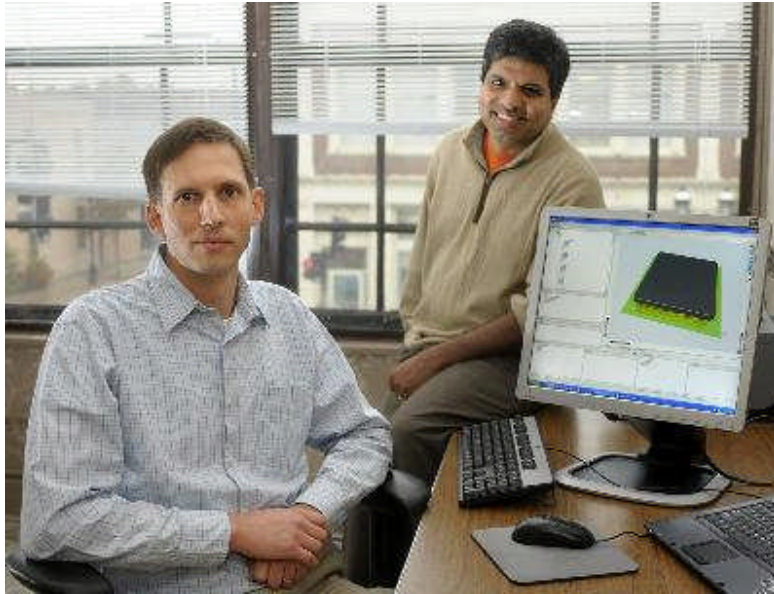


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Innovate Illinois: SFM helping electronics designers

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James Stori, left, and Placid Ferreira, are the founders of Urbana-based SFM Technology, developers of software technology for modeling electronic components.

Two local companies are among 12 statewide finalists that will compete in the Innovate Illinois finals Nov. 10 in Chicago. Here's a closer look at SFM Technology.

URBANA – Jamie Stori said it was a challenge to explain SFM Technology briefly, but clearly, to a panel of judges last month.

But he must have done OK, because the Urbana-based company was chosen as one of 12 statewide finalists in the annual Innovate Illinois competition.

"It was definitely an interesting experience for us, to try to come up with an explanation of what we're doing that makes sense to a nontechnical audience within a five-minute time frame," said Stori, the company's 38-year-old president.

SFM Technology, formed in 2005, develops software to help electronics designers manage component data better. The tool could help improve communication between a company's electrical and mechanical design divisions, Stori said.

"Our customer base would be electronic OEM (original equipment manufacturer) companies that design and manufacture electronic products," Stori said. "Our initial focus is on the aerospace and defense sector."

SFM's software, which is graphical in nature, brings together and synchronizes information needed by electrical, mechanical and manufacturing areas.

Stori, a former member of the University of Illinois Department of Mechanical and Industrial Engineering faculty, and Placid Ferreira, head of the UI Department of Mechanical Science and Engineering, founded the company after collaborating on several research projects.

One project for Rockwell Collins, an avionics manufacturer, involved developing tools for the analysis of printed circuit board designs.

"We saw an opportunity to develop new tools in that area," Stori said.

Stori and Spencer Burton, then a student at the UI, worked two years on software, leading to a tool that Rockwell Collins uses to evaluate the manufacturability and testability of printed circuit board designs.

For now, SFM gets revenue from three places: Rockwell Collins; contract work for the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and Small Business Innovation Research grants from the National Science Foundation.

But SFM expects to generate its first revenue from component modeling technology in the next year or so, and Stori believes there's a big market for it.

"There are about 15,000 companies that would need this technology," he said. "Worldwide, about a half-million designers are involved in this kind of design work."

SFM's focus now is getting evaluation releases of the modeling tool to several large companies that have expressed interest.

"In the next 12 months or so, we hope to have the first commercial releases of modeling technology," he added.

Stori believes the tool can solve some long-standing problems for electronics companies.

"The main problem is the amount of time and effort people are spending just managing component data related to their electronic designs," he said.

He figures designers spend more than 10 percent of their efforts managing component data, and he believes SFM can reduce that by at least a factor of two.

Stori said SFM – which stands for "Scalable Flexible Manufacturing" – plans "pretty aggressive revenue growth" in the next few years, though he would not cite figures.

SFM Technology

What it is: Developer of software that helps electronics designers manage their component data better.

Founders: Jamie Stori and Placid Ferreira

Established: 2005

Address: 110 S. Race St., Suite 201, U.

Web site: www.sfmtech.com