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## **MassTech Intern Partnership Bolsters Growing Robotics Firms in Mass.**

### *Boston-based Neurala Utilizes Group of Local Interns to Develop Brainpower for Robots*

One of the first companies to take advantage of the MassTech Internship Partnership has hired several of their former Boston University interns as fulltime employees, using this innovative program to recruit the local talent that are helping the company grow. The Intern Partnership allowed Neurala, a small robotics artificial intelligence startup based in Boston, to bring on the extra talent necessary to explore product ideas beyond the initial R&D stage.

Prior to joining Neurala, BU seniors Ethan Marsh and Tim Seemann worked at the University's Neuromorphics Laboratory, designing and testing artificial brains to control mobile robots. After applying to the Intern Partnership, they were invited to join the Neurala team, thanks in large part to the Intern Partnership's matching grants, which split the cost of each intern position with the company.

When their internship with Neurala began, the company was participating in the TechStars accelerator, an experience both Marsh and Seemann highlight as one of the best parts of their internship.

"TechStars was an unmatched experience you wouldn't get in a corporate setting," says Marsh.

Seeman also added that the exposure to the accelerator environment, where they worked side-by-side with other startup employees, provided a good introduction to a larger part of the startup community.

Both Marsh and Seemann made the transition from intern to full-time employee with the company, noting that working for a startup offers many opportunities to build upon their academic backgrounds, not to mention greater responsibility, flexible work hours, and more meaningful work.

Based on the increased work capacity that their interns, and now employees, brought to the team last year, Neurala chose to once again participate in the Intern Partnership for 2014. This year they hired Alexandra Defreitas, a BU undergraduate with expertise in design, to expand the company's design functions.



"Neurala has talented software engineers, but no design experience," stated Massimiliano Versace, CEO of Neurala. "This program allowed us to bring an intern from the BU College of Communications, who brought a fresh perspective and the latest thinking in design, to help make our products more

usable."

Defreitas had worked on-campus jobs before joining Neurala, but prefers the versatility that comes with the startup environment. She was surprised to learn about the opportunities for design students in the startup world, in addition to the more common software developers or engineers usually hired by the community. Defreitas' knowledge of user experience design (UX), coupled with Neurala's technical expertise, allows both the intern and the company the ability





to grow through the program. Neurala executives noted the strength of the robotics sector in Massachusetts, which they believe makes the Commonwealth #1 for talent in both robotics and artificial intelligence, another key reason they want to build their company here. Neurala is not the only robotics company that has taken advantage of the Intern Partnership program, as startups such as *Artaic* and *Myomo* have hosted interns.

According to a *report from MassTLC*, the Commonwealth is home to over 150 robotics companies and over 35 robotics R&D programs across 18 institutions, which includes the New England Robotics Validation and Experimentation (NERVE) Center at UMass-Lowell, “one of 3 NIST test facilities in the nation.”

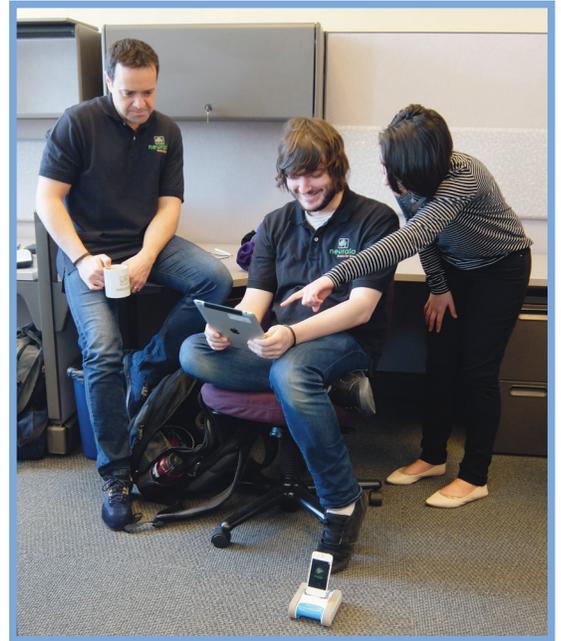
Roger Matus, Neurala’s Vice President, feels the Commonwealth’s biggest strength to attracting and fostering a talented pool of high tech professionals are the higher education and research institutions spread throughout the state.

“Massachusetts’ greatest natural resource is higher education,” said Matus. “We need to keep these talents [students] here and move them from college into industry. This program is the bridge connecting students to professions.”

Neurala’s CEO echoed those sentiments.

“In addition to cranberries and apples, we also grow brains here,” said Versace.

The MassTech Intern Partnership aims for college students and tech companies across the state to have positive internship experiences like the one at Neurala. For college students, the program introduces them to real-world education opportunities in entrepreneurship and innovation. For small to midsize technology companies, it connects them to a skilled talent pipeline to enable them to grow. For Massachusetts, it’s a way to capture more of the state’s own homegrown talent. Everybody wins.



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