

Space Spin-Off, Done Right...by Richard Godwin

A few years ago Sam Donaldson, the famous newsman, was interviewing then NASA administrator Dan Goldin. During the interview Goldin told Donaldson about the technological spin-off that transferred from NASA into the public realm of private industry.

Donaldson was not aware that such a spin-off list existed and asked Goldin where he could find out more. Goldin said that a list was available as a book published once a year by the agency. Donaldson was dumfounded and told Goldin that he needed Goldin to tell him about this spin-off list, today, tomorrow, the day after and ad nauseum into the future until it sank into the public consciousness. Goldin said he would comply but apparently did nothing.

Another incident happened to me a few years ago whilst I was engaged in the March Storm political lobbying performed by ProSpace the citizens space lobby group. Upon entering a senator's office for New Hampshire, our group was basically told to hurry up and make our presentation because space didn't have much to do with NH and therefore they were not that interested in hearing from us.

I thought about this for some time afterwards, thinking how I might have made that senatorial staffer sit up and take notice of our message. Here is what I eventually came up with.

Politicians understand two things really well, taxes (money) and votes. Put the two together and you have the ear of any true politician.

This is what I would have liked to have done in that office that morning in Washington.

I would have liked to have asked if I could have used the staffer's computer to find something on the internet. I would have asked for a specific congressional district within the Senator's home state. On a website that has not yet been created I would have been able to pull up any congressional district in the nation and been able to see at a glance any industry or indeed specific company within that district that was utilizing a NASA spin-off technology to manufacture a consumer product for the general marketplace, how many people were employed making that product and if possible how much taxes that company paid into the treasury coffers.

Now this level of specific information is no easy task to classify, it would require thousands of hours of preparation and verification to ensure that it was correct. Initially I thought that the project could be the work of several graduates

working towards their PhD's., but recent web developments have lead me to another methodology to enable this to happen, one that is not as onerous but that still requires intense peer review verification. The way to make this happen is by means of a Wiki style of data entry. A central team of experts would filter the information to ensure its validity and accuracy.

Once this website reached a critical mass, it would be the ultimate show and tell for politicians and public alike whenever anybody questioned the efficacy of spending government money on space exploration, as it would show in easy to understand numbers just what space technology means to the nation's economy at large. A politician if asked why we spend money on space exploration could point at a factory down the road making a product that was initially invented or created by or for NASA. It's spin-off made personal and local. It would have a huge impact on how lawmakers and the public looked at space spending.