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Urban Science

Opportunities for retailers revealed from piles of data

By JOHN GALLAGHER
FREE PRESS BUSINESS WRITER

If selling cars is an art, it's also a science, and that's where Jim Anderson and his team come in.

Founder and president of Urban Science, a data analysis firm based in the Renaissance Center in Detroit, Anderson has spent 32 years helping auto companies decide where to put dealerships and how to sell more cars.

His tools: Mountains of data collected by the U.S. Census Bureau and other sources, and a set of problem-solving, data analyzing software programs.

"I like to think of the company as a bridge between the world of science, mathematics and engineers, which is basically problem-solving, and the world of marketing," Anderson says. "Science plus marketing is better than marketing by itself."

The roster of clients includes automotive giants like General Motors, Ford, Chrysler, Toyota, Honda, Mercedes and BMW. But banks and insurance companies come calling, too.

And even in a bad economy, Urban Science is growing. The firm's data mining helps customers sell more products and save money in the process. In today's economy, people are more interested in saving money in the process.

"We've been fortunate to continually grow the business," Anderson says. "Thirty-two years, 32 records." Urban Science did about \$80 million in revenue last year and hopes to top \$100 million this year.



KIMBERLY P. MITCHELL/Detroit Free Press

Jim Anderson is president and founder of Urban Science, which has offices in the Renaissance Center in Detroit. Anderson says his 500-person workforce (about 200 in the RenCen) could grow by well over 100 more.

Urban Science

Headquarters: Renaissance Center, Detroit

Employees: 500

Global reach: Operates in more than 70 countries from more than a dozen offices in the United States, Europe and Asia.

Founder and president: Jim Anderson

Products and services: Data mining and analysis to help auto retailers and other clients locate retail outlets and more efficiently market to customers.

In assessing a client's retail network, Urban Science gathers a wide range of data on sales, demographics, financials,

customer satisfaction and other factors. They map this data down to the census tract level and mine it to uncover hidden opportunities both for the retailer and for its individual outlets.

The goal: Help each client capture more market share and manage the business for greater profit.

Last week, the Michigan Economic Growth Authority approved a \$2-million tax credit over 10 years to help Urban Science growth even more. Anderson says his 500-person workforce (about 200 in the RenCen) could grow by well over 100 more.

The typical hire has a degree in math, science, engineering —

all problem-solving types — or computer programming. Those working in the field with clients need a winning personality, Anderson says.

A yen to travel doesn't hurt, either. Urban Science operates offices in London, Paris, Rome, Tokyo, Beijing and several other world capitals.

It's the sort of knowledge-based firm that often leaves Michigan for warmer climes. But Anderson came to town to attend Wayne State University in 1963 and never left.

"We have a choice," he says. "We could be in Paris right now or any of those other cities. But we choose to be here in Detroit."

■ CONTACT JOHN GALLAGHER: 313-222-5173 OR GALLAGHER@FREEPRESS.COM



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