

FAU helps put Motorola on fast track

By [Kimberly Miller](#)

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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The MOTOKRAZR phone plays your favorite music and films your kids' music recital. The Q lets you operate eight e-mail accounts at once. Tomorrow, there may be a cellphone that can finish the dishes and take the dog to the vet.

And although it seems like newfangled phones debut daily, the time lag between idea and production can be up to two years, which is a lifetime for a company trying to predict consumer demand and beat the competition.

Florida Atlantic University students are working to reduce that 24-month delay to 24 hours.

They've got it down to about six months now, and if they're successful, new Motorola cellphones will make it to shelves faster than ever before.

A joint FAU and Motorola project, One Pass to Production, pairs teams of university students and professors to find ways to reduce communication and technology delays that stymie Motorola's production process.

For example, students will use new Semantic Web technology to find and order parts for Motorola products. The Semantic Web allows computers to perform several functions in sequence, such as find a physical therapist near a person's house, check the person's schedule, and book an appointment.

Motorola gives FAU about \$250,000 a year for the project, which is expected to last eight years.

"They need to know what the customer wants tomorrow and then be able to ship it to them," said Ravi Shankar, an FAU computer science and engineering professor working with Motorola. "That means finding an integrated way of doing this, instead of just the throwing-it-over-a-wall kind of thing."

Most of the work the students do is behind-the-scenes research, but it's required stuff for companies to remain competitive.

Seven students who worked on the project in the past have been hired by Motorola. Five students from FAU's Boca Raton campus and five from the Treasure Coast campus are part of the project.

Jaime Borrás, a Motorola senior fellow working with FAU, said the students basically are acting as the company's research arm.

"They are finding new technologies to help us improve our cycle time," Borrás said.

One product FAU may be able to speed through production is a phone with wireless Internet access that will be as fast as home computers with DSL.

"They are the ones looking into the future," he said.