

360insights CEO and President Jason Atkins has converted a decommissioned public school into its next headquarters and plans to have all Canadian team members at the location by the end of the year.

Photos by Ryan Pfeiffer / Metroland

Downtown home to emerging *Innovation Hub*

By Linda White

Would it surprise you to learn the world's first integrated cloud-based incentives software platform is located in Downtown Whitby? Or that for the past five years, that same company has consistently placed in the top four places to work in Canada?

That's not all. Last year, 360insights earned a spot on Deloitte's Technology Fast 500 list of the 500 fastest-growing technology, media, telecommunications, life sciences and energy tech companies in North America. It also ranked as one of Canada's fastest-growing technology companies in the Deloitte Technology Fast 50 awards for demonstrating bold innovation, dedicated leadership and strong growth.

CEO and President Jason Atkins says he's often asked why he chose to locate 360insights in Whitby. "I tell them it's an amazing place to live...We don't want to be a bedroom community. We want to be a place where you can live, work and play. I think work-life balance should be work-life integration...That has been my focus."

For years, Atkins had been commuting from his home in Whitby to work in Cleveland, Ohio. His career path shifted after his daughter called him 'Uncle Jason' one weekend. "I tried to buy the company and move it to Canada but they didn't want

me to move it so I resigned," he recalls. "I rented a building a couple of blocks from my home and decided I would build a company so I could be around more often."

Established in 2008, 360insights (previously known as 360incentives) has operations in the U.S. and United Kingdom. The company – which has grown to more than 250 employees – provides on-demand incentives solutions for various organizations and is the originator of the Channel Success Platform.

About five years ago, Atkins shared with Jim Balsillie, former co-CEO of RIM in Waterloo, his plans to build a billion-dollar company in Whitby. "He wished me good luck and told me the thing he learned is you can't build a billion-dollar company alone – you have to build an ecosystem...I was already in Downtown Whitby and that really started my path to building a tech hub."

Today, that ecosystem is thriving. According to a report published by the Whitby Economic Development Office in November 2016, Whitby is home to a dozen innovation and tech companies employing more than 450 people, with an average reported starting salary of approximately \$67,000 per year. These companies have added a variety of local jobs and have a

combined annual payroll of \$30.2 million and \$60.4 million in annual revenues.

And it goes beyond the tech industry. Atkins believes businesses like The Brock Street Brewery, which has broken ground in Downtown Whitby, restaurants, entertainment and shops are also part of a strong ecosystem. Further to his goal of creating a tech hub, he launched a tech investment fund called City Flow Project to help companies move beyond the idea stage and into the business market.

INNOVATION HUB

The Town of Whitby recently announced plans to create an Innovation Hub that will support start-up companies, helping them grow and succeed in Whitby, Durham Region and beyond, while building the Town's economic future.

A not-for-profit organization will be created to lead, market and manage it. The Town will provide office space, as well as in-kind and possibly financial support. Town Council will receive an operation strategy, plan and outline of municipal contributions needed to support the project this fall.

Ongoing revitalization supports the Town's vision of making Downtown Whitby a strong employment district. "My personal view is that downtowns really matter

because they belong to everyone and they should be your central gathering space,” Mayor Don Mitchell says. “We want the town to be complete, balanced, vibrant and centred around a downtown core – just as a traditional, organically-grown community is centred around its downtown core.”

Today, Whitby’s innovation ecosystem is home to information and communication technology (ICT) companies like Deighton Associates Limited (infrastructure asset management software developers), geekspeak (e-commerce product content developers), Horn IT Solutions (IT security and hosting), KAI Innovations Inc. (personal health records systems), Keyscan Inc. Access Control Systems, Oogled (search engine optimization and social media solutions), RocketCloud Inc. (web design and search engine optimization) and Waypoint Golf, Inc. (tournament management software).

LOCAL INNOVATION

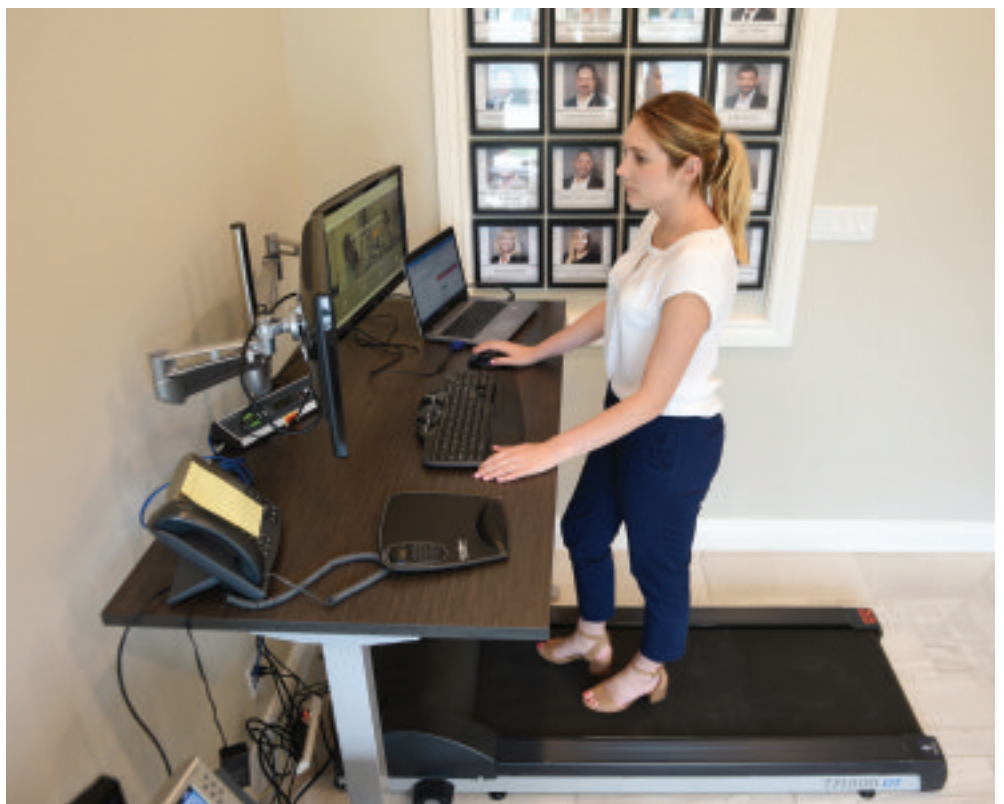
Another member of the innovation ecosystem, Predictive Success Corporation, develops behavioural assessment software to help businesses find and keep talented people. Prior to establishing the company in 2006, Founder and President David Lahey worked at Microsoft and his daily commute from Whitby to Mississauga was taking its toll.

McKinsey Global Institute predicted analytics – the discovery, interpretation and communication of meaningful patterns in data – was the next big thing. “My idea was to use analytics to help people hire great employees. We have software that creates an algorithm that we call the ‘predictive index’ that companies are using to hire.”

Predictive Success has been named three times to PROFIT magazine’s annual PROFIT 500 list of fastest-growing companies, which ranks Canadian businesses by their revenue



Predictive Success Founder and President David Lahey at The Success Centre on Byron Street. The company offers flexible hours, ‘Ferris Beuller Days Off’ and stand-up and treadmill desks.



Kayla Van Schyndel, manager of shared services, on the treadmill computer at Predictive Success.

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The Province's former Land Registry Office site will become the Town's new Innovation Hub.

Innovation Hub on the way

The Town of Whitby has announced plans to create a new Innovation Hub to support innovative start-up companies.

The Whitby Innovation Hub will build on the success of the Spark Regional Innovation Centre's business incubator by helping entrepreneurs move to the next stage in the business development cycle, receive greater depth and breadth of support, and secure resources and capital to grow their business.

To be located at the Province's former Land Registry Office site, the Hub will contribute to the ongoing revitalization of Downtown Whitby while driving high-value job opportunities for local residents.

growth over five years. Its clients include Google, Magna International, Scotiabank, CIBC, RBC Wealth Management and Export Development Canada. "We have clients all over Canada and the U.S.," Lahey reports. "We even work with one NHL team to help them select coaches. All of our research team members are from the Durham area. We get jazzed about the pool of talent in Durham – it's huge."

Predictive Success is a CityFlow foundation member and is quick to credit the Town of Whitby for its support of the Innovation Hub. "We believe in five years there will be 30 tech companies in Whitby...We have a bunch of emerging companies that are starting to grow and have success," says Lahey. "The reality is people are looking for work-life balance."

Digital Ink Technologies Founder and CEO Rob Ragusa chose to locate his web design, search engine optimization and graphic design services company in Downtown Whitby about five years ago. "We were looking for a place close to home," says the Whitby resident. "I wanted to keep business in Whitby, innovate in Whitby and hire people in and around Durham Region."

DIT has partnered with brands like CIL, Pizza Nova, Swiss Chalet Harvey's and Molson Coors. Ragusa regularly sees employees from other innovation companies while having lunch. "Whitby has a cool downtown core," he says. "It has a nice community feel. We work with companies like 360 and we only got that business connection by being in the area."

BUSINESS SERVICES

In addition to the Town of Whitby's Economic Development Office, downtown businesses can rely on a variety of business services for support, including Business Advisory Centre Durham, BDC - Business Development Bank of Canada and Whitby Public Library.

The Whitby Chamber of Commerce unites local professionals with the purpose of advocating for their rights, compiling resources and doing business together. By connecting local businesses, it fosters a thriving business community and through events, it creates opportunities to celebrate local business, establish solid relationships and develop business leads.

The Spark Regional Innovation Centre

houses a business incubator centre in the Centennial Building that works with start-ups to help get them to market. "Typically, innovators have great ideas that need further fleshing out and – almost always – the support of experts to guide their business through to full commercialization," says President and CEO Sherry Colbourne.

"Spark surrounds Durham innovators with talent they most often couldn't afford on their own in order to create the building blocks of success: product development, an effective go-to-market strategy, financial modelling, marketing and sales, digital e-commerce, legal and so on," says Colbourne.

Andy Bruce, founder of MobileXCo, won Spark's first Ignite start-up competition in 2013. More than 40 brands and retailers have used MobileXCo's platform over the past three years, including Kellogg's, Nestle, Mountain Dew, Starbucks and McDonald's. Last year, the company launched Tether, a new subscription-based software that allows companies to create personalized branded experiences such as coupons, contests and surveys in minutes. 