

# Vouchers for Ventures

*Alberta Innovation Voucher Pilot Program provides support to startup companies*

BY T.L. DUDAR

If you are the founder of a small company than you are no stranger to adversity. New technology and knowledge-driven businesses within Alberta know all too well the challenge of getting their ideas, products or innovations to market. At times it seems there are endless roadblocks to transitioning a product/invention or idea into a leading company, with some never getting off the ground.

The Alberta government launched the technology commercialization action plan “Bringing Technology to Market” to help small technology and knowledge-driven businesses in Alberta get their ideas and products to market faster. One of the plan’s initiatives is Canada’s first Innovation Voucher Pilot Program. Through this popular program, companies can apply for vouchers and if approved are awarded up to \$50,000 for redemption at any approved public and not-for-profit service providers of business and technology development services within Alberta.

Companies receiving a voucher can select from a list of approved service providers offering vast expertise in advancing technology and innovation. Calgary-based Baseband Technologies Inc. did just that. After receiving their voucher they engaged Calgary Technologies Inc. (CTI).

“This is an ingenious program. That voucher opened so many doors for my company. I connected with CTI, and with their expertise and guidance, we determined the appropriate path to advance my company towards commercialization success. They have the experience in matching real business needs with their support networks,” says Francis Yuen, CEO, President and Founder for Baseband Technologies Inc. His company is in the process of commercializing a software-based global positioning system (GPS) receiver for digital cameras. Their technology will allow digital camera users to tag photos with geographical data that will simplify the user’s ability to retrieve photos from their library. The GPS receiver overcomes size, speed, interference and power challenges. At 200 times faster than a blink of an eye, Baseband’s software GPS receiver may change the way we store and retrieve photos.

Their prototype did not come without hard work. The idea, innovation and prototype took years to create, develop, test, recreate and redevelop. “We needed patents to protect the intellectual property so I could begin speaking publicly about the innovation and keep moving forward with my company. We engaged CTI through the voucher program and we have now filed four provisional patents,” says Yuen. “Without that voucher, I may not have connected with CTI or any service provider at this stage. I am glad I did. Their team helped me refine our business plan and started the momentum for my

company. I also elected to use many other services that they have such as Go-to-Market, Alberta Deal Generator and worked closely with their team who gave me great insights.”

“The Innovation Voucher Pilot Program is a needed resource for small technology-based companies,” states Brandy Jeary, program manager at CTI. “The program supports technology entrepreneurs in the early stages of company growth, while allowing service providers the opportunity to engage clients that they may not otherwise have connected with. After engaging with CTI through the voucher program, it is quite common for our clients to access our other programs. The voucher program is one more avenue for entrepreneurs to connect with service providers who help take their innovation/product to market faster, to the benefit of both our economy and the technology community.”

To date, CTI has assisted 34 clients in the first round in 2009 out of the 179 companies awarded vouchers across Alberta. CTI supported companies with projects such as assistance with market assessments, intellectual property review, patent application, prototype development and product planning. Each client was consulted with to determine the appropriate path in order to increase the impact of their voucher in accelerating their business. Partnering small startup companies with service providers helped complete projects and/or identify critical business plans to grow their company. “We have received positive feedback about the voucher program and I am confident there will be many more success stories as the innovation voucher program enters its second round,” say Jeary.



For Baseband Technologies Inc., there is still more work to be done in moving from prototype to entering the marketplace. “We are now actively engaging digital camera manufactures and customizing our software for those manufactures. We are glad to have received a voucher, to work with CTI and now we are ready to take those critical steps towards our commercialization success,” says Yuen.

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