SUCCESS STORY: GEOTAB

ABOUT GEOTAB EV

When large technology companies buy smaller ones, they often assimilate the technology and intellectual property, integrate the workforce and, eventually, leave the company’s original community.

But that’s not what happened when Geotab Inc. bought Waterloo-based FleetCarma last year. Geotab decided to not only keep the staff in Waterloo but to invest and expand the Waterloo division, now known as Geotab EV, that processes vehicle data to help manage electric vehicles in fleets.

Geotab, a global telematics company with headquarters in Oakville and more than 1,000 employees worldwide, didn’t just see a good technology to add to its portfolio, explains Neil Cawse, chief executive officer at Geotab. It saw the people who make it work.

“Sometimes people look at a technology and think the value is the product that is sitting over there,” Cawse says. “[FleetCarma’s] product was great but what was more beneficial, of greater value, was the knowledge that came along with it.”

ELECTRIC POTENTIAL

The Waterloo office now operates out of Catalyst137, a hub that contains several companies that, like Geotab, are in the Internet of Things (IoT) technology sector. The division is growing and now has around 80 people, including about 20 who came from BSM Technologies, a Toronto-based telematics company that was also recently purchased by Geotab.

Geotab’s GO device is gathering data in nearly two million vehicles in fleets around the world. Most of the fleet vehicles are gas or diesel, but with the push towards electric, Geotab saw a unique opportunity for growth by expanding the office in Waterloo and investing in further research and development on the technology that does telematics for electric vehicles.

The company has a long-term vision of making electric into much more than a niche market, Cawse explains.

“One of the reasons we purchased FleetCarma was to double down on that vision and make sure they have the
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resources and the investment to extend it and become much bigger than it was before.” This acquisition was never about cost-cutting or just assimilating a technology, he adds. “Our purpose was to take one plus one and make it equal three.”

Meanwhile, from the view of FleetCarma co-founders Matt Stevens and Chris Mendes, the acquisition was a perfect marriage that allowed them to realize the same dream that Geotab has. They too envision a much larger electric vehicle future with telematics on board.

“As FleetCarma, we had around 10,000 devices deployed in vehicles, but now we are part of one of the largest fleet telematics companies in the world with nearly two million devices in vehicles,” says Stevens, who along with Mendes is now a vice president of the electric vehicle division of Geotab.

“The vast majority of those vehicles are still gas or diesel but I am incredibly excited to be able to flip that,” Stevens says. Geotab has the resources to provide customers with a more seamless experience as they transition from gas and diesel to electric, he adds.

Key to the decision to join forces was the fact that the two companies share a similar culture, background and vision, Stevens and Cawse say. “When we walked into the Geotab office, it just felt like what we wanted our company to become.”

WATERLOO: A PLACE TO GROW

There were several reasons for deciding to expand in Waterloo, Cawse says.

Access to talent, including the talent coming out of the universities, is an obvious part of it. “This is an excellent area to hire in.”

Geotab also hires engineers from all over the world, and Waterloo has a diverse community that, while close to Toronto, is more affordable, Cawse says. It is also a good location close to the United States market, he adds.

Moreover, for a company like Geotab, which heavily uses machine learning in doing data analytics, there is no better place to be, Cawse says. It so happens that Canada has built up world-renowned expertise in machine learning, which is part of artificial intelligence. There are hubs of that expertise in Montreal, Toronto and Waterloo.

“We are all about collecting data and drawing powerful insights from that data,” Cawse says. Fleet operators need to know, for example, when an electric system on a vehicle is about to fail because vehicle breakdowns on the road are costly. Today’s artificial intelligence tools make it possible to provide better and more advanced knowledge of what is going on in the vehicle. “Machine learning has a profound impact on what we do,” Cawse says.

Waterloo is also part of the Toronto-Waterloo AutoTech corridor, where multiple companies are working on connected car and automated driving technology. Toyota, for example, recently opened a research facility in the same Catalyst137 building as Geotab. That hub is also home to Miovision and other companies that are in the IoT
space and using machine learning.

To Geotab, that is a bonus. “It’s all about co-operation,” Cawse says. “We try to co-operate with as many companies as we can. We believe that strength comes from partnering and working together.”

**EXCITING NEW MARKETS**

Cawse says Geotab has a worldwide reach because its devices are on vehicles in over 127 different countries and on every continent, including Antarctica, where they are in snowmobiles that researchers use to get around.

There is still enormous potential for more growth all over the world, and electric vehicles will be a big part of that future, Cawse says. By gathering the data on the vehicles that are already going electric in places like Europe and helping them problem-solve the transition of fleets to electric, “we’ll be able to bring those lessons to North America as well,” he adds.

As the data sets become richer with information and machine learning becomes more powerful, there are future opportunities that open up, in helping to optimize traffic flow in cities. “There are exciting new markets that we can address in areas like smart city transportation. Ultimately, we could act as a kind of switchboard for connected vehicles,” Cawse says.

Stevens says it feels good to be part of an opportunity to make transportation safer and more environmentally friendly.

“It is important to me that when I go home, I can be proud of what I worked on that day,” Stevens says. Cawse adds that everyone at Geotab shares that philosophy of wanting to “make a difference in the world.”

Geotab’s new office located within Catalyst 137.