

The London Free Press



IT'S A CELEBRATION

25 years later and Joe Kool's is still going strong — surprise!
DOWNTOWN LIVING C8

Disney
HIGH SCHOOL MUSICAL
THE ICE TOUR

LACE 'EM UP

A primer to High School Musical as it brings its Ice Tour show to London. TICKET T4, 5

Variably cloudy, High -10° Low -11° Details on Page B2

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2008

www.lfpress.com section A

ilookabout has eyes on world

BY NORMAN DE BONO



A London software firm is driving the streets of North America, in its own drive to become a global player.

ilookabout, a small business on the fourth floor of the Royal Bank building downtown, is gearing up to go public in a bid to raise up to \$7 million, planning an aggressive expansion into the U.S., said chief executive Jeff Young.

It's a big step for an upstart — just 19 Canadian technology companies went public in 2007 and 22 the year before, according to TechFinance.ca, a company that tracks tech companies initial public offerings.

“We see this as a global opportunity,” Young said. “We are offering a virtual walk through a city.”

The company is thinking locally too, offering its service free at London city hall so it can better show off what it can do around the world. “They want a host partner and they’ll do it for free,” the city’s chief administrator, Jeff Fielding, told board of control yesterday.

If city staff can iron out details around privacy concerns, Londoners may soon see the company in action — ilookabout drives streets of a city and shoots a high resolution photographs every 4.5 metres, placing longitude and

latitude on every photograph. It then stitches images together to create a detailed image of what it’s like to drive down that street, getting a close look at homes, street addresses and even details on utility poles or trees in front of yards. After creating a database of city streets, ilookabout sells that access to subscribers.

“This is expensive data to capture and we cannot give it away for free,” said Young. “The bottom line is, this is new. A lot of people have never heard of this. We are educating people.”

Its clients include real estate businesses, municipalities, emergency services and engineering firms. It hopes to interest the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

“If you are a municipality and a tree has fallen, they can see where the tree is before you go out there. For insurance purposes, you could have a detailed look at what New Orleans looked like before the natural disaster. Municipalities can use it for reconstruction photography,” said Young.

In London, Fielding hopes the technology will help emergent workers find location more quickly and be better prepare when they arrive.

Controllers were enthusiastic. “This has worldwide implications,” Controller Gord Hume said.

The software is similar to what is offered free by Microsoft and Google and ilookabout's challenge will be providing to clients its products are better, said Joe Francica, editor-in-chief and vice-publisher of Directions Magazine in Huntsville, Ala., which writes about "geospatial technology."

It may be similar, but the difference is in "detail and quality," said Young. "They use videos and our resolution is four times better than what they are capturing."

While raising \$7 million through an initial public offering on the TSX Ventures Exchange may seem ambitious, ilookabout has already raised \$3 million from private, angel investors, said Young.

Ilookabout will have photographed cities in Ontario representing about 80 per cent of the population by the end of the year.