

Summer Company 2017: Cole MacDonald Mero Technologies

Cole MacDonald has big plans for bathrooms.

He has designed a sensor that keeps track of bathroom dispenser levels and the amount of traffic that has come into bathrooms in order to alert building managers and their cleaners when washrooms need maintenance.



His company is called Mero Technologies and was launched with the help of the summer company program.

He says the idea for the sensor product initially came to him when he worked for a property management company in his hometown, Toronto.

"I would basically sit in a basement and I would make excel spreadsheets about how cleaners and how maintenance people would do their job. And so, I kind of realized as I was doing this, that a lot of the stuff these people fill out every day could be automated – like, could be done just by a sensor or something like that."

After realizing the potential and that nobody had done it yet, Cole decided he would. As a 20-year-old computer-engineering student at Queen's University, it was right up his alley.

He was initially drawn to the summer company program for its \$3000 grant, but quickly realized the program offered far more beneficial things.

"The networking within Kingston was really valuable as well as the mentorship," he says. "I think those are the two most valuable things."

Through his networking and reaching out to possible clients, Cole says Mero Technologies is now working with some huge multinational hygiene companies.

"It's going really well to the point where we have lots of customers that want to try things out and we still need to finish the product 100 per cent. And so that's kind of a unique situation because usually it's the other way around where – especially with technology – you create some kind of new technology and you're begging people to use it and with us it flipped over. So it's a really interesting and fun situation, but it also puts a lot of pressure on you."

Cole's company has gotten enough interest from the public that he was interviewed on CBC radio.

He says the official launch of his sensor will take place in 2018, about a year after his original idea for the product, and that he expects the result will be very profitable.

"It's really easy for everyone to relate to a story about, like, they go into a washroom and it's unclean and disgusting and those establishments – wherever that happens – really stays in someone's mind. So it's really important for building owners – and they recognize this – to keep things clean."

The sensor itself will be installed in bathrooms and able to read the levels of products in dispensers including soap, paper towel and toilet paper. It will then make predictions and send alerts to managers and/or the cleaners via text message. Managers will also have access to a website where all of the data can be accessed.

"Everyone loves it. It's one of those products that people are like: why hasn't this already been done yet?"

Cole's summer has been spent building and testing this sensor to ensure it does everything he says it can smoothly and efficiently.

"It's been honestly just a lot of working on the product, making sure it's reliable and that the battery life is okay. And then on the other side of that is going up to customers and presenting what we have and what we can save in terms of material costs or staff."

He plans to continue his company and product and develop it into a career, saying once you try entrepreneurship you end up loving it.

"The way that it's going– especially in the past couple weeks – I can see this being a long-term business for sure."

