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A Nuclear Renaissance

CEO and President Mark Zimny sits down with Vantage to discuss Promation Engineering's entrance in the nuclear market and its success in the GTA

By: Dana Lacey

Tell us about Promation.

I earned a diploma of mechanical engineering at a polytechnic university in Poland. I came to Canada in 1987 and decided to settle in Mississauga – a great city where I still live today. I launched Promation Engineering Ltd. in 1995 with a focus on tooling, automation and 3 robotic systems for the automotive industry. And I then added nuclear capabilities in 2005. We now serve customers across North America, in Asia (including South Korea and Japan), Europe (including Germany and Poland) and Africa (including the Republic of South Africa). Since we already have working relationships with these countries in the automotive industry, we're ideally positioned to build global partnerships on the nuclear side of our business.

Why did you choose the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) to launch your business?

The City of Mississauga, the GTA and Ontario in general has a very strong business environment. I had the support of organizations like the Greater Toronto Marketing Alliance, the Business Development Bank of Canada and the Mississauga Board of Trade (MBOT). Today I still sit on MBOT's advisory committee, and am a member of the Chamber of Commerce. For years, the majority of my business was conducted in Mississauga. I live there too – I'm a Mississauga man. The GTA has allowed my company to grow from a basement operation to an international company with 75 employees. And we now offer turnkey engineering solutions: everything from conceptual design, development and testing to manufacturing, installation, training and maintenance.

What made you decide to begin shifting your business focus from automotive to nuclear?

It's important to be diversified. While we've been quite successful in automotive, it is no longer the strongest industry: we've lost the U.S. customers we sold machines and robotics to. Now we're focusing more on the domestic market. We'll come back to the U.S. with the proper certifications and requirements to compete in nuclear instead. I excel in the nuclear market – I was trained in the energy industry. I believe this is the energy of the future, especially for Ontario, where 50 per cent is already nuclear. I believe that only nuclear can replace the vast amount of energy produced by fossil fuel. Oil prices going up and up, climate change, climate warming, man-made disasters...all help justify investment in nuclear.

What steps is Promation taking to go nuclear?

Nuclear is a slow investment. Because Promation is a mid-sized company, it does not have vast resources to do a really huge global marketing research push, yet it has to be able to sell itself on its own merits. We're building alliances and partnerships on a global scale to help us understand foreign markets. It's a slower process, but it is going well so far. Entering the nuclear market is a huge, continuing investment in upgrading your equipment and getting various certifications, which we're working on. The first step was re-training and hiring. The industry expects top-of-the-line experts that have a solid

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background in manufacturing, and Promation has that. Our nuclear division employs Canadians that have been in the industry more than 20 years. The GTA, as Canada's centre of research and education in the nuclear industry, made a logical place to go nuclear.

In January you moved your company within the GTA. Why?

A lot of our employees live in Oakville. The city is full of high-level sophisticated businesses, and automation is also part of its general business program. I had a fantastic welcome by the city and by Dorothy St. George, Oakville's director of economic development. She helped me prepare my business before I even moved, so the transition was easy. Part of my business plan was to get a \$2 million loan from the Canada Action Plan's community adjusted fund. Oakville, a smaller community with less than 150,000 people, helped me meet the loan's conditions. The location is perfect – close to the suburbs, and close to the nuclear market, including reactors like Darlington and Bruce Power. We're near Atomic Energy of Canada Limited (AECL), who we do a lot of business with (including contracts to refurbish its flagship CANDU reactors) and SNC- Lavalin, which is one of the largest global nuclear companies in Canada. We purchased a big building that has the space we need for our new kinds of projects and that will help us grow the business.

What is Promation's role in the GTA's economic development?

Within the next four years, we plan to double our presence in the nuclear market – which will be worth \$15 billion by 2020. In Canada alone there are a few dozen reactors that need to be refurbished. We're going to help shape the changes the domestic nuclear industry is going through right now.

What changes do you think would revolutionize the auto and nuclear industries?

I believe that Canada's economy is not going to improve in the long term unless we have a breakthrough, which could be as simple as the electric car. It would turn the auto industry around, investment would flow – and electricity comes from nuclear. I believe now is the time to invest in nuclear, because in two years it'll be too late.