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iFathom brings order to chaos for Ontario games

By Kristin Harold, Ottawa Business Journal Staff

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A local tech firm is being credited for ensuring a smooth run at last month's Ontario Summer Games and organizers hope its IT solution will help Ottawa win the games again for 2008.

iFathom Corp. became involved with the Summer Games after expressing interest in the city's bid to host the 2014 Commonwealth Games late last year. The company has been delivering complete IT solutions to private and public sectors since 1991 and has experience with large sporting events.

Although Ottawa lost the bid for the Commonwealth Games to Halifax, iFathom's ability to create a needed IT solution was recognized by Pat Reid, who was involved with the Commonwealth Games bid and is also co-chair of the Ontario Summer Games local board of directors.

The Ontario games, which have been held every two years since 1970, involves athletes between the ages of 11 and 22 and serves as a training ground for future Canada Games competitors and Olympians. This year, the games took place in Ottawa from Aug. 9-12 and involved 2,435 athletes from across Ontario, as well as 506 coaches, managers, trainers, support staff, 199 officials and 841 volunteers.



Leo Tardioli, president and CEO of iFathom. (Darren Brown, OBJ)

"It was clear from the initial planning phases of the games that a robust technology solution was needed to meet the complex administrative requirements of the games and incorporate the specific requirements of each of the 20 sports," says Mr. Reid. "At the 2004 Summer Games in London, another company had created a solution that they wanted to sell to us for an exorbitant cost, but we said 'C'mon, we're a not-for-profit group.' So, I said since this was Ottawa, we have 1,500 OCRI companies and we'll find our own technology."

iFathom president Leo Tardioli was approached and he became the director of information technology for the Games. In return for iFathom's efforts, the company was plugged as a gold-level sponsor.

The company was tasked with developing a web-based administration system for the games that could handle the requirements of a multi-sport event. The solution had to incorporate participant registration of the more than 3,000 athletes and the fact 20 sports were taking place at 30 venues, as well as accreditation, scheduling, real-time updates of results and the administration needs of over 800 volunteers.

"This was right in our niche so it was a good fit," says Mr. Tardioli. "iFathom's development team integrated the participant registration process directly into the real-time results system, meaning that a participant could register for the games, get their games accreditation and view their standings and results, all from the same system, while maintaining the privacy and security of their information."

The firm also coordinated installation and technical support for all the IT requirements at the various games' operation and registration sites and worked with local company Northern Micro, which supplied laptops to the organizers.

The importance of information security was also heightened due to the young age of the participants.

"We had to make sure that the information gathered remained private and wasn't leaked, so we added additional measures to ensure tight security," adds Mr. Tardioli.

The administrative needs for this kind of multi-sport event can be a "nightmare," says Mr. Reid, but iFathom's application received rave reviews from everyone involved, with praise for the system's ease of use and flexibility.

"The ability to schedule volunteers online greatly reduced our level of effort in these games," says director of volunteers Cheryl Hazenburg. "Using the system, we were able to strike a good balance between placing people in their areas of interest and

ensuring that we had enough volunteers working in the areas of greatest need."

The information captured by the system will continue to be useful because organizers now have a database of more than 840 volunteers who can be contacted to assist with future events. Mr. Reid says they will also be able to produce comprehensive results information for entire sports, individual athletes and teams when needed.

Mr. Tardioli says the company's proprietary software is now being reviewed for future use and provincial organizers are excited about the possibilities.

"Thanks to the efforts of iFathom's ingenuity, this system could substantially reduce one of the biggest and otherwise most complex components of any of Ontario's games – the creation and management of the IT component," says Blair McIntosh, the director of games for the Sport Alliance of Ontario.

Along with the Summer Games, the province also holds the Ontario Winter Games, Ontario Games for the Physically Challenged, Ontario Senior Games and Activfest.

Mr. Reid says iFathom's solution will also figure prominently in what he hopes will be a successful Ottawa bid for the Ontario Summer Games of 2008.

"There's been a precedent set in Kitchener/Waterloo which hosted back to back games, so we're hoping to see the games return to Ottawa in 2008," he says. "Our figures show that the economic return to the city for the 2006 games was between \$3.2 million and \$3.4 million, so everyone benefits from it."

Mr. Reid says he will head up the "Bid for 2008" committee and he expects to seek a financial commitment from city council later this month.

"I think we have a good chance to successfully bid for the games again because of the support from all our corporate sponsors, including iFathom."

