Innovative Automation

Located in Barrie, Ontario, Innovative Automation Inc. is one of the most creative manufacturers of custom automation solutions in North America. It is Innovative Automation's Vision to "Be the first choice provider of automation solutions to global leaders in manufacturing". To ensure that it is equipped to handle even the most complex machine solutions required by its customers, Innovative Automation has an electrical systems design team, a mechanical design team, a programming team, and a mechanical build team.

Headquarters	625 Welham Rd, Barrie, ON, L4N 0B7
Year Established	1989
NAICS	333990 - All other general-purpose machinery manufacturing
Employees	123
Major Expansions	2017, 2018
Exports	U.S., Mexico
Parent Company	N/A
Other Locations	N/A

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The current president and co-owner of Innovative Automation, Stephen Loftus, founded the company in 1989 with Jim Carnegie and Paul Tyndall. For the first six months of operations, the three founders would

build customer relationships by knocking on doors. After receiving their first large contract (worth $250,000) in their first year of operation, they maintained steady growth until 2016. A period of rapid growth began in 2016, with the number of full-time employees increasing from 65 in 2014 to 123 Innovators in 2018. In 2013, Michael Lalonde and Matthew Setterington joined Loftus as co-owners. In December 2017, the company moved into a new 62,300 square foot building to increase capacity and gather all operations under one roof. In July 2018, an additional 24,750 square feet will be added to the facility.

Innovative Automation has enjoyed over 25 years of continuous growth in sales and customer retention, largely due to its dedication to customer satisfaction. Prior to beginning a new customer project, the firm employs a rigorous process of understanding the customer's machine requirement needs. Once the company has a complete understanding of the machine requirements, it is able to focus on machine safety, ergonomics, throughput, cycle time, efficiency, uptime, layout, and maintenance accessibility. Innovative Automation provides additional value to its customers by using functional testing, as well as data collection and manipulation, to look at trends within a product. Rather than testing pass/fail like most companies, the company analyzes trends to observe what is happening inside the product so it can make changes proactively. As a result, employees at Innovative Automation are able to educate customers about product options that they were not aware of. The majority of sales are for projects delivered in Canada, United States or Mexico, with other installations including Brazil, Western Europe, Eastern Europe and China.

Innovative Automation also maintains a high level of involvement within the local community. One out of every four employees are Georgian College graduates, which highlights the long-term relationship the company has fostered with the college. Innovative Automation is a proud sponsor of the annual Georgian College Golf Classic. Loftus and his team are also heavily involved with Big Brothers Big Sisters. In addition to sponsoring the annual bowling and curling events organized by the charity each year, many employees form teams to participate in these events. United Way is another charity that Innovative Automation has supported for a number of years. The company holds multiple annual events to raise money for United Way, with the most famous event being the annual "Pie in the Face" contest. One year the company raised $20,000 for United Way with this one-hour event, and its annual donation eclipsed $50,000. During each summer, Innovative Automation hosts 10 charity barbecues where each department chooses a charity to support. On the company's 20th and 25th anniversaries, the company held the "Innovative Automation Day of Caring". All of the employees had breakfast together before going into the community to volunteer at a charity of their choice (at their normal daily pay). At the end of the day, the employees reported that they had benefitted more than the charities from this initiative.

Innovative Automation successfully weathered the 2008 economic downturn, and was well-prepared to handle the drastic increase in demand after the downturn. A current challenge for Innovative Automation is acquiring appropriate talent. The company would be able to grow at a much faster pace if the talent it required was readily available. To overcome this lack, the firm has begun developing its own talent through interactions with universities and colleges. Innovative Automation recently donated $250,000 to Georgian College/Lakehead University's new Advanced Technology, Innovation and Research Centre to support the Georgian/Lakehead new Electrical Engineering Degree program and the development of students who will be qualified to join the manufacturing industry. The company often hires students from Georgian College, Guelph University, Waterloo University, and University of Toronto. At present, Innovative Automation employs 18 summer students, with the hope that they will continue at the firm after graduation. To ensure that these potential employees have a well-rounded understanding of the business, the company provides an extensive training program across multiple areas. The training program is taught by full-time employees, and gives students the necessary foundation to eventually move into senior-level positions with the company.

All three co-owners of Innovative Automation understand the importance of capitalizing on recent trends in the manufacturing industry. They attend pertinent seminars in order to understand the different technological advancements and offerings that become available. For example, Innovative Automation's customers are slowly beginning to understand the value of data collection and analysis. The company has been taking advantage of internal data analysis for years, as this allows it to track prices, hours, and assigning of costs. This analysis has given the firm a much better understanding of its own projects, and assists with providing quotes for customers. Innovative Automation's experience with data collection and analysis means that the firm can incorporate this technology into its products if customers desire it. Over 50 percent of the company's projects already involve some form of data collection, which often provides customers with the opportunity to apply preventative maintenance.

Loftus keeps up to date with government funding initiatives to ensure that Innovative Automation is capitalizing on programs that will benefit the company. In the past, the firm has used the Industrial Research Assistance Program for select research projects, been involved in the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters' SMART program, and utilized the Accelerated Growth Service during its period of rapid growth. The company has also received funding for training, and plans to look into these beneficial funding opportunities further in the future.

Innovative Automation seeks to continue its growth by becoming an increasingly global company. Many of its customers are building the same product in multiple locations around the world, and are beginning to wonder why they are using different manufacturing equipment in different locations. Innovative Automation plans take advantage of this opportunity by creating strategic partnerships outside Canada and supplying its customers with products and assistance in multiple locations. The firm is also looking to diversify the business by increasing its non-automotive sales. In line with this goal, Innovative Automation has and will continue to develop technology that can be sold to different customers without the need for customization. A separate research and development team has been assembled with the sole purpose of exploring this idea.

Within the automotive industry, Innovative Automation has already begun manufacturing products for electric car start-ups, and plans to pursue this as another avenue for growth. The rapid growth experienced over the past two years, and the anticipated demand increase in upcoming years, has already motivated the company to start expansion plans for its current facility and search for additional facilities nearby to lease. With all of these promising developments on the horizon, Innovative Automation demonstrates how Ontario manufacturers can use Industry 4.0 to develop innovative products, improve production efficiency, and provide additional value to customers.