

## Mobile check-in system gets test with Aéroports de Montréal

**PETER HADEKEL**

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For consumers, wireless technology offers not only the ability to access information on the go, but to conduct transactions as well.

That's where the greatest opportunity lies, says Vivianne Gravel, president and controlling shareholder of Montreal-based wireless-solutions provider LIPSO Inc.

"You're in a meeting in Toronto. You get a message that your flight is on time. You're in the taxi to the airport, and you can start your check-in."

In fact, that's exactly the deal LIPSO has struck with Air Canada and Aéroports de Montréal, which are currently testing a mobile check-in system that uses LIPSO's bar-code technology.

"You can receive your boarding pass (on the mobile device) in encrypted fashion, so it's secure," Gravel says. "When you get to the airport, you simply pass it in front of a scanner and you get your departure gate."

Gravel believes it's the right product at the right time. Given the increasing tie-ups and delays at airports, anything that can speed the passenger process will be welcomed.

"We targeted the airline industry because the security requirements are so strict," she says. "If we pass the test in this industry, every other business will be open to us."

Founded seven years ago, LIPSO is a \$4-million company with a client list that includes wireless operators Rogers, Bell and Telus and a number of customers in the media business.

TV show, and news clips for CBC and Radio Canada.

An entrepreneur who studied law and industrial relations, Gravel was a consultant in business turnarounds when she and a partner started LIPSO in 2000.

"We asked ourselves, after the Internet, what is the next big technology wave going to be? We saw the possibility of using wireless interactive technology to conduct consumer transactions."

Started with \$400,000 in capital from friends and family, the company was barely born before the tech bubble burst.

They hunkered down, put their money in the bank and, with the help of Montreal's École de Technologie Supérieure, were able to patent software that allows data to be routed between mobile devices and computer networks.

"We created a platform that is standardized to allow content to be displayed on all kinds of mobile phones," Gravel explains.

"We wanted to make it simple for the consumer to access the information and conduct the transaction."

Gravel's partner left and the company teetered on the edge. But by 2002, Desjardins Venture Capital was ready to invest \$1.5 million and Canada's National Research Council offered a \$400,000 loan.

The company is profitable today, with a staff of 25. But growth so far has been slow.

A difference of opinion with Desjardins prompted Gravel to buy out the venture capital firm this year.

"We didn't share the same vision. I had worked hard to build a patented technology and I wanted to build for the long term. A VC wants to sell as soon as things start to go well.

"I decided to go for it and buy it back."

Gravel recruited Sophie Hennion, an executive from Aéroports de Montreal, to take over as chief executive officer, with the goal of rolling out the technology to the international transportation industry.

Hennion notes that their business plan fits well with the stated desire of the International Air Transport Association to move to electronic ticketing and boarding by 2010.

The firm is currently negotiating to supply customers in Europe's airline industry. The goal is to double sales year-to-year.

But while transportation is its niche market, the company sees good potential elsewhere.

"A lot of operators like the idea of bar code technology," says Gravel. "This can work for theatre tickets, movie tickets. We have projects with several companies."

Mobile marketing campaigns offer a potential avenue for growth as well as mobile payment systems that allow customers to purchase an item and pay the wireless operator, who then reimburses the merchant.

"It's a promising technology," she says, "but there's still work to be done."

phadekel@videotron.ca

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