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the entrepreneurs

ODOTECH MAKES its mark by detecting excessive industrial odours and helping companies solve the problems

Opportunity is in the air

PAUL DELEAN THE GAZETTE

The more Thierry Pagé learned about the environmental challenges of modern industry, the more he smelled opportunity. Odours from industrial processes are a fact of life the world over, one that citizens and governments are increasingly loath to tolerate.

Helping companies and municipal utilities control those odours was a need that could only grow, in his view.

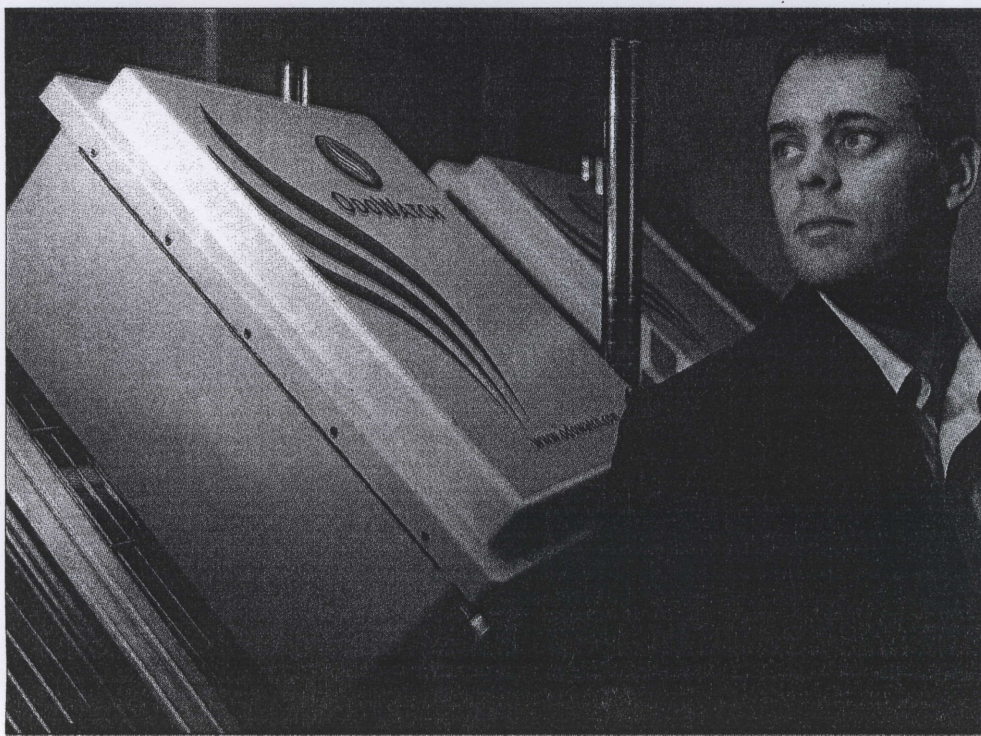
It led the École Polytechnique graduate to start up an odour-monitoring business, **Odotech Inc.**, a Polytechnique spinoff that has expanded from two employees to 50, opened offices in France and Chile, and this year marks its 10th year in operation.

Since 2006, it has had a strategic partnership with the world's leading operator of water services, **Veolia**, for the commercialization of its technology.

"We have projects with them around the world," Pagé said.

Odotech already has won several business awards and recently was cited as a Quebec finalist in the "cleantech" category for the 2009 Ernst & Young entrepreneur of the year awards.

"The work is very stimulating," said Pagé, 38, in an interview at corporate headquarters on Queen Mary Rd. "Every time we help an industrial enterprise solve a problem, the quality of life of hundreds of people gets improved. Seventy per cent of air-quality complaints in industrialized



PHIL CARPENTER THE GAZETTE

CEO Thierry Pagé says his goal for Odotech is to become a global brand synonymous with solutions in odour monitoring.

countries are about odour."

A key to Odotech's emergence has been its development of a patented "electronic nose," a box the size of a residential electrical panel containing sensors that continuously monitor air quality. The readings are analyzed by

a computer program and accessible by Internet. They show how far the smell will carry.

Officials get notified directly if norms are exceeded.

"This way, they're the first to know, so they can react accordingly. It's proactive. Used

to be the phone calls came first," Pagé said.

Odotech also works with the companies to find ways of reducing the smells in a cost-efficient way.

That means understanding and analyzing the industrial processes employed.

"We help everyone from small businesses to the largest manufacturers. Most want to be good neighbours," Pagé said. "If the solutions were obvious, they'd have found them already. But there usually is one if you figure out what the problem

is and do a thorough diagnosis. We bring objectivity to a problem that often is treated subjectively."

Odotech has clients in 20 countries, including several waste-treatment plants and operators of landfill sites.

Pagé said annual revenue falls into the "\$3 million-to-\$8 million" range.

He's still the major shareholder, but now has 15 partners, including several employees.

It was during his chemical-engineering studies at École Polytechnique (he subsequently obtained a master's degree in Belgium) that Pagé began to focus on air quality, and more specifically odour management. One of the early projects he was involved in was the municipal landfill site at the old Miron quarry in St. Michel.

When he couldn't find an employer doing the kind of work he really wanted to do, he launched Odotech.

"What I didn't realize (at university) is that I'm an entrepreneur," he said. "I thought I was a researcher."

His goal, he said, is for Odotech to become a global brand synonymous with solutions in odour monitoring.

"Smell is by far the most complex sense," Pagé said.

"Human DNA contains one gene for hearing, three for vision, 12 for taste and 1,000 for smell. It's almost unexplored territory. There is much left to do and discover."

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