



Connectivity for Communities

PRESS RELEASE
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Stratford's Municipal Broadband Company Brands as Rhyzome Networks

Stratford, Ontario, CANADA – After several years of quietly operating in the background, the City of Stratford's data infrastructure company has debuted as Rhyzome Networks. The company tagline is, "Connectivity for Communities", reflecting the importance of broadband internet access for municipalities, businesses and residents. The Rhyzome name is a play on the rhizome root systems connecting and propagating plants such as the iris, Stratford's civic flower.

Rhyzome Networks operates a 50-km data transmission grid of buried optical fibre running throughout the city, and is constructing a citywide wireless network that accesses the grid to provide mobile high-speed internet access – slated for completion by September 30, 2010. While a handful of North American cities have ventured into public wireless services, Rhyzome aims to become a transferable model for other cities and towns across Ontario.

"Rhyzome Networks is critical to the City's strategy to establish Stratford as a digital technology centre and an internationally recognized intelligent community," says Stratford Mayor Dan Mathieson. "The fibre optic grid is foundational as data infrastructure for local industry and institutions, and the wireless initiative brings broadband connectivity literally out into the open to serve Stratford residents and businesses."

WIRELESS MESH DEBUT

Rhyzome Networks showcased its fibre/wireless combination with complimentary high-speed wireless internet access during back-to-back conferences hosted in Stratford: the Ontario Small Urban Municipalities conference (May 6-7, 2010), and the Canada 3.0 digital technology conference (May 10-11, 2010).

"The first phase of the Wi-Fi network was installed, covering the downtown area and a swath running north to the Stratford Rotary Complex where the conferences were held," says Paul West, Rhyzome's Business Development Manager. "The attendees were able to email, blog, network, tweet, upload, download... everything they need high-speed internet access to do."

"It was great timing to rollout the first phase of the City's wireless system, given the community development focus of OSUM, and Canada 3.0's emphasis on digital strategy. Both events demonstrated the leadership role Stratford is establishing with 'carrier-grade' broadband connectivity."

OPTICAL FIBRE GROUNDWORK

Rhzyme's sister company, Festival Hydro, started laying fibre optic transmission lines in 1998 in response to the needs of large customers for broadband connectivity between multiple sites, such as FAG Schaeffler, Cooper Standard, The Stratford Shakespeare Festival, the City of Stratford, Hydro One and Ontario's Ministry of Health. After a capital investment of \$1.2 million, Rhzyme Networks (as Festival Hydro Services Inc.) was hived off as a separate entity to own and operate the data transmission grid. Building the wireless project has been a joint effort between Rhzyme and Festival Hydro.

CITYWIDE WI-FI

Rhzyme's citywide Wi-Fi network will be used by Festival Hydro to meet the Ontario Energy Board's requirement to retrieve hourly time-of-use data from 18,000 residential and commercial electricity meters without having to dig and run wires to each and every home and business. Each day, the Wi-Fi 'smart meters' will beam encrypted data to wireless collection points (or nodes) mounted on utility poles throughout the city, tap into the underground fibre grid, and deliver the data to Festival Hydro.

"Effectively, Rhzyme Networks is a data utility," says Doug MacDougald, Chair of Festival Hydro and Festival Hydro Services. "Festival Hydro doesn't generate electricity, it's a utility transmitting that power to users over a grid. Similarly, Rhzyme doesn't create data, we're a data transmission company providing connectivity through a grid that connects data users."

"Rhzyme is also looking into future opportunities in related areas of data storage systems and cloud computing services."

Rhzyme Networks is a data infrastructure company operating the underground fibre optic grid running throughout Stratford, and a wireless network spanning the city. Rhzyme is wholly owned by the City of Stratford and part of Stratford's strategy for a broadband economy.

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