

# The Gazette

## Parked at the cutting edge

Young firm banks on deal with city. 8D's system allows easy monitoring and motorists can pay without returning to car

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Motorists heading downtown will soon be able to leave their cars at solar-powered parking meters.

And when they do, they will be feeding their money into a device that was developed by a Montreal company.

Isabelle Bettez and Jean-Sebastien Bettez are the siblings behind 8D Technologies Inc., an 8-year-old firm that developed "the brains" that run these newfangled machines.

Last year, 8D teamed up with parking-equipment maker Cale Systems Inc. - a Montreal subsidiary of Sweden's Cale Access - and promptly snagged a contract to supply meters to the city of Montreal.

They are on the leading edge of a trend toward high-tech parking terminals in cities around the world.

The software and hardware developed by 8D uses the Linux operating system and connects to a broadband wireless network which enables payments to be processed instantly.

It is housed in a blue box - slightly larger than a paperback novel - that is slotted into each terminal, each of which replaces 12 to 15 traditional meters and is configured to accept coins or credit cards.

Here's how it works:

The motorist takes note of the parking-spot identification code displayed on a sign in front of his parking spot.

The motorist then enters this code into the nearby meter and pays the fee with a credit card or coins. A receipt is issued but the motorist does not have to return to the vehicle.



Developing innovative parking-meter technology is a family affair at 8D Technologies, whose solar-powered devices can make life easier for customers and meter operators. Isabelle Bettez works as chief executive while her brother, Jean-Sebastien Bettez, serves as chief technology officer. Isabelle is holding a device that turns a parking meter into an intelligent, fully programmable wireless payment terminal. Jean-Sebastien is holding a device that allows a parking inspector to monitor meters.

CREDIT: MARIE-FRANCE COALLIER, THE GAZETTE

Later, if the motorist wants to add time to the meter, he doesn't have to return to the meter closest to his car - he can pay at any meter connected to the network by simply entering the parking- spot identification code.

"It's the concept of 'pay and go,' " Isabelle Bettez, president and chief executive of 8D, said in an interview at the company's light-filled downtown office.

The network of parking meters is controlled by a central computer that allows the owner to instantly update or make changes to all, or some, of the machines on the network.

If, for example, the owner wanted to temporarily increase the fare on a group of machines for the Jazz Festival, this can be done remotely from the central computer.

As well, parking officials do not have to exit their cars to monitor the machines - although they still have to step out to write tickets and deliver them.

Instead, they monitor the machines using handheld wireless "parking assistants" that have electronic maps displaying which parking spots are occupied, which spots have been paid for and which spots are delinquent in payment.

Since December, the city has deployed 26 meters in the downtown area. They can be found on St. Catherine St. W., near the Le Faubourg shopping centre and also on McKay, Crescent and Bishop Sts.

The city decided to test the meters as a means of providing a more efficient and user-friendly parking system for motorists and parking officials, said Jean-Claude Dubreuil, executive vice-president of the Societe en commandite stationnement de Montreal, the agency that manages Montreal's metered parking.

Another advantage of the terminals is that installation involves only bolting them to the sidewalk so they are easy to remove if needed, he added.

Testing has gone well and "we are ready to recommend that they be deployed," he said, adding that if the city approves of the meters, 500 of them will be installed in the downtown area.

8D was founded in 1996 by Jean-Sebastien Bettez, 34, a computer-science graduate from Universite du Quebec a Montreal, originally as a computer-services firm specializing in Linux and Unix training and support services for various clients, including Dell.

At the same time that Jean-Sebastien was running 8D, his sister, Isabelle, 38, a business graduate from the Hautes etudes Commerciales, was busy running her own consulting firm, providing marketing and sales services to the technology industry.

"I really didn't want to work with somebody from the family," she recalled in an interview. "But we complemented each other. He is on the business side and I am on the marketing and sales side."

In 2000, they teamed up and soon found themselves developing software to process payments in real time for a client in the parking industry.

This led to the development of the hardware and the end product became "the blue box" in the parking meters. The same box could be used for many other purposes, she said, explaining that it could be used to sell concert tickets, for example.

Bettez said she and her brother are the two shareholders of the privately held firm, adding that it has always been profitable, although "we've been more break-even during the time we were investing to develop the new technology."

"What we see in the very near future - like this year - is profitability coming back."

As for the future, Bettez said 8D, which employs 20, is working on more potential parking-terminal projects in the U.S. and Europe, as well as on other projects using the company's wireless point-of-sale technology.

This week, the firm signed a partnership deal with Sun Microsystems to work on projects using this technology.

"Nobody said it was for parking only," she said with a chuckle.

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