



Hospitality, Marketing & Tourism

FlyOver Canada entrepreneurs build new US\$20 million facility in U.S.

Venture is bankrolled by Vancouver Canucks owner Francesco Aquilini

By Glen Korstrom | April 16, 2015, 9:00am



Forty under 40 alumni Stephen Geddes and Andrew Strang are both hands-on principals in FlyOver Canada

Entrepreneurs behind the successful two-year-old tourism attraction FlyOver Canada at Canada Place are expanding to the U.S. with a US\$20 million investment to build a similar FlyOver America attraction at Bloomington, Minnesota's Mall of America.

Vancouver Canucks owner and Aquilini Investment Group principal Francesco Aquilini is the deep-pocketed partner in the venture while Stephen Geddes and Andrew Strang are the more hands-on entrepreneurs.

“The Mall of America represents the U.S.’ largest retail and entertainment complex and has a staggering 40 million visitors every year including more than 16 million tourists,” said Strang, who is FlyOver Canada’s CEO. “It’s an ideal destination for our expansion into the U.S. market.”

Approximately 700,000 guests have visited FlyOver Canada to date.

When the \$16 million FlyOver Canada theatre opened in July 2013 , it was priciest privately funded tourist attraction since investors pumped \$22 million into the now-closed Storyeum in 2004.

The initiative tapped into a global trend of entrepreneurs opening new so-called “4D” attractions that augment visual and audio with other sensory stimulation, including technology that thrusts theatregoers forward in their seats between three and 10 metres toward a giant circular screen.

The Walt Disney Co. (NYSE:DIS) had launched similar exhibits at its Disney California Adventure Park and Epcot theme park, and Overseas Chinese Town Group had built a similar attraction at its Happy Valley theme parks in China.

Participants at FlyOver Canada are strapped to their seats and watch a scenic movie that fills their direct and peripheral vision. They are sprayed with mist when the movie shows a waterfall, smell trees when the movie shows a forest and feel the breeze when the movie shows a gusty landscape.

The capital outlay covered the cost to build a new 60-seat theatre that includes a 20-metre diameter screen. It also covered production costs for the exhibits.

“We think it’s a great investment,” Aquilini told Business in Vancouver at the time. “About eight million tourists come to Vancouver every year, and this is just one more thing for them to do.”

Strang and Geddes are both past winners of BIV’s Top 40 Under 40.

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