

[ENTREVESTOR: Industrial Internet of Things means opportunity across Atlantic Canada](#)

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Richard Jones, entrepreneur-in-residence at Propel ICT.

The Industrial Internet of Things (IIoT) is still a relatively new field, one ripe for development in a region such as Atlantic Canada, where there are educational and business systems primed to boost entrepreneurship.

This is the belief of Richard Jones, an entrepreneur-in-residence at Propel ICT, Atlantic Canada’s startup accelerator.

Jones has decades of experience in the business world, including as CEO of both Eigen Innovations and Shift Energy, two of the highest-profile IIoT outfits in the region.

IIoT refers to machines communicating with, and taking instructions from, each other without human interference. These machine interactions allow industrial processes to be optimized. For example, Eigen’s Intellexon product selects data from sensors and other sources in a customer’s plant, analyzes it and adjusts machinery — all in real time — to reduce waste and improve efficiency.

“IIoT is the sector where engineering technology and information technology overlap,” Jones said.

“IIoT is an opportunity for a region like Atlantic Canada, where there are many good engineering and computer science schools producing graduates with the relevant skill sets, as well as creative business minds and programs and accelerators that allow them to come together.”

Jones cited the example of Fredericton-based Blue Spurs, a recent winner in the 2017 AWS City on a Cloud Innovation Challenge for its Blue Kit Internet of Things starter kit.

Amazon Web Services recognized 19 organizations from around the world during the contest. Blue Spurs won for Blue Kit, which it developed in collaboration with CyberNB and the New Brunswick government. Blue Kit is an IoT starter kit that allows middle and high school students to understand IoT fundamentals.

“When we get those kits in the hands of high school students, we’ll see more IIoT ideas coming out of universities,” Jones said. “It’s a huge opportunity...The industrial economy amounts to about a quarter of global GDP.”

Jones contrasted the current development of the Internet of Things with the early days of the internet.

Those days, he said, were dominated by Silicon Valley, but that needn’t be the case now.

“In 1995, the internet was just getting developed. It was focused on solving consumer-based problems or the flow of information, like on Facebook.

“Silicon Valley owned the first generation of the internet. They financed it, drove it and the rest of the world picked up the crumbs . . . The Valley got in a dominant position because of the money and talent that flowed in there.

“But with the IIoT, users need to customize good foundational technology to gather data about their own processes. Analysis of the data allows them to become more efficient.

“There are massive opportunities for people to help with analysis and feed analytics back into industrial processes.”

Becoming a Propel entrepreneur-in-residence is a kind of homecoming for Jones, who was a member of Propel’s board of directors from 2006-11. The Fredericton native, whose many qualifications include an MBA from Dalhousie University, would love to see lots of companies in the IIoT space in all the region’s accelerators.

Certainly, entrepreneurship is becoming more popular.

“When I first got involved with Propel in Saint John in the mid 2000s, entrepreneurship was almost like a dirty word,” he said. “Entrepreneurs were viewed as not mainstream, not conformist enough to get a job in a big company . . . Now it’s the thing to be an entrepreneur. That’s partly because we’ve had some successful exits (company sales) and success breeds success.

“I’m in my mid-50s. One of the reasons I’m hanging around in the startup community is I feel a sense of mission to help develop the next generation of leaders who’ll transform our world.”