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## Sly as a (Lobby)Fox

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Leitchfield native Jeremy Jacobs built Enlighten, a cannabis-focused digital menu and advertising company that was acquired by public company WM Technology, and is now growing the LobbyFox company that provides visitor management solutions for manufacturers.

Photo courtesy of LobbyFox



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Photo courtesy of LobbyFox

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Picking out the successful entrepreneur at Monday's Bowling Green Area Chamber of Commerce ribbon cutting could've been challenging for the business-suit types at the Western Kentucky University Innovation Campus.

It's unlikely, though, that Jeremy Jacobs would have been the first pick for many.

Sporting cargo pants, a pullover and a baseball cap with enough fraying to make you wonder if it was left over from when the building was the "old mall" a few decades ago, Jacobs looked more like the fiddle-playing, gun-shooting country boy he is than a candidate for a Forbes magazine profile.



And yet the Leitchfield native has one, having been included earlier this year in the highbrow publication's list of pioneers in the cannabis industry.

Jacobs, in fact, was the cover boy for the mg magazine that covers the recreational and medical cannabis business and the subject of a feature on his Enlighten digital menu and ad company.

That story appeared only last year; but, in the New Economy world inhabited by Jacobs, it seems like ancient history.

Jacobs sold Enlighten earlier this year to WM (for Weedmaps) Technology, and the serial entrepreneur quickly moved on to his latest venture: the LobbyFox company that provides touch-screen kiosks that help manufacturing plants manage visitors and other lobby traffic.

If that seems like an abrupt change in business strategy, then you don't know Jacobs.

A former honor student at Grayson County High School who earned an academic scholarship to Georgetown College, Jacobs quickly eschewed academia and pursued a nontraditional path to business success.

“I went to Georgetown and didn’t like it, then went to ECC (Elizabethtown Community and Technical College) and didn’t like it,” Jacobs recalled Monday during an interview in the LobbyFox offices. “WKU was the last college I dropped out of.”

Instead of pursuing any sort of professional or technical degree, Jacobs has chosen to stoke a love of technology that was first kindled when his parents bought him a Commodore 64 computer more than three decades ago.

A high school electronics class helped Jacobs learn to build and repair car stereos – one of his first forays into entrepreneurship – and later led him to a world-altering discovery.

“Everything you need to know is on Google,” he said. “If it’s not, how to find who does have the information is on Google. It’s all available at this point.”

Armed with that knowledge, Jacobs set out on a journey of invention and risk-taking that has at times been bumpy.

Interested in mining, Jacobs invented a magnet technology that could eliminate coagulation in pipelines.

That led him to develop a fracturing technology that allowed natural gas trapped in layers of rock to be extracted and also introduced him to the vagaries of the fossil fuel business.

“In 2007, the natural gas markets collapsed and I lost pretty much everything,” Jacobs said. “I went from being worth millions of dollars on paper to being worth nothing.”

But those who know Jacobs knew he wouldn’t be down long.

“Jeremy is a superstar entrepreneur,” said Buddy Steen, CEO of the Innovation Campus on Nashville Road where Jacobs has set up shop. “He’s a brilliant innovator who always rises to the top.

“He’s extremely focused on what he does. He focuses on problems that are hard to solve, and he solves them.”

That’s evident in Jacobs’ latest endeavor, which was on display at that chamber of commerce ribbon cutting.

Already in the electronic sign business through his work creating digital menus for restaurants, Jacobs expanded on that because of his work with Evansville, Ind.-based Berry Global.

“We had been building products for them (Berry) for the past five years, helping them communicate with their staff and improve safety,” Jacobs said. “The vice president of the local division (in Bowling Green) came to us and said, ‘We have another problem.’ “

That problem – how to process visitors to the plant efficiently and consistently – eventually led to the launch of LobbyFox.

Jacobs and the team at the Eyeconic company that grew out of his work on digital signage went to work creating a kiosk that allows visitors to sign in, view orientation and safety videos, notify company personnel and print a visitor badge.

“As we continued to work with Berry from one facility to the next, we started to see that there are a lot of common problems,” Jacobs said. “Then we started talking to other manufacturers and realized that these aren’t just Berry issues.

“Everyone in the entire manufacturing space is having these problems.”

The response from Berry further demonstrated the potential of the kiosks to both improve visitor check-in efficiency and possibly save on personnel costs.

“You don’t realize you need the solution until you use it,” said Nathan Marret, the Berry executive who approached Jacobs about the problem initially. “It’s an opportunity to provide a more secure check-in process and allow visitors to view a safety video.

“It has also allowed us to free up a receptionist and allow them to do other work.”

Such customer feedback led Jacobs to check into the growth potential of LobbyFox.

Jacobs and his staff of some two dozen people ran the numbers and discovered that about 250,000 factories in the U.S. and another 750,000 internationally met the criteria for a LobbyFox kiosk.

“We decided we really had something here,” Jacobs said. “There’s a massive market for this product with a lot of potential.”

LobbyFox’s customer base already numbers in the thousands, Jacobs said, and he hints that this latest

venture under the Eyeconic umbrella could follow in the footsteps of Enlighten.

“I wanted to build something that I could spin off,” Jacobs said of Enlighten’s sale that made him vice president of in-store solutions for publicly traded WM Technology. “I think LobbyFox could be the next thing.”

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