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# York Region firms' mapping systems a big hit with municipal customers

BY JEROME WATT  
 Staff Writer

It started three years ago with five friends and \$100.

Today it's grown to 28 employees with revenues of \$5 million.

Richmond Hill's Orion Technology Inc. has experienced tremendous growth as a provider of Geographic Information Systems (GIS) for cities and municipalities worldwide.

Locally, the company has set up web-based systems for Markham, Richmond Hill and the Municipality of York Region.

Meanwhile, the Town of Newmarket is considering whether it should add the feature to its website.

"We're in the business of Geographic Information Systems," vice-president Shafik Jiwani said.

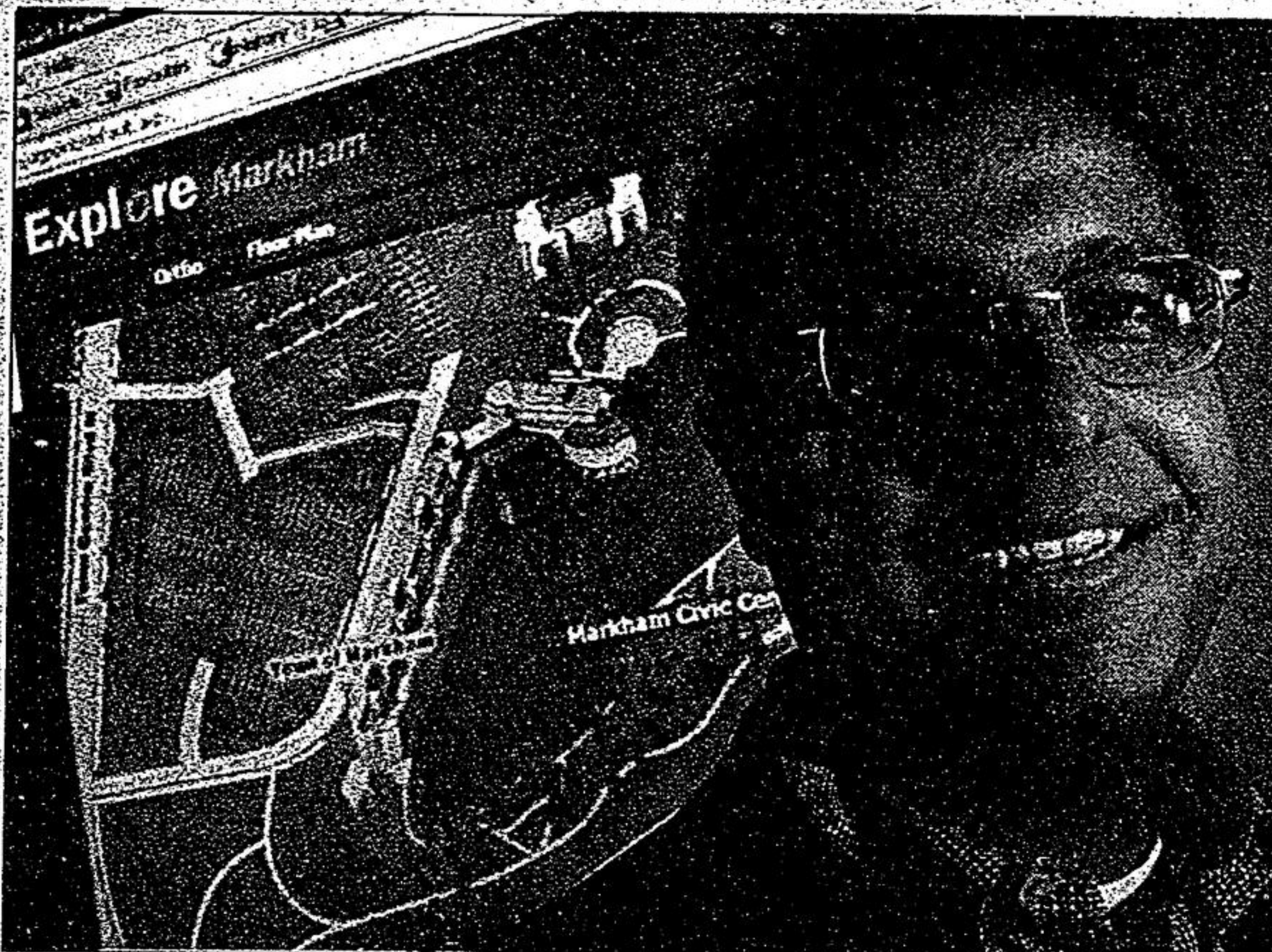
"It's a set of computer tools that allow you to deal with geographic data. Our approach is to provide GIS to the masses."

The five partners in the business, Zul Jiwani, his brother, Sharik, Satinath Sarkar, Mohamed Nishath and Nathan Thiya discovered a gold-mine in making GIS applications for municipalities.

For years local governments have been collecting all sorts of data that could be represented on maps.

"We saw a niche and we capitalized on it," Jiwani said. "The municipalities have all the ingredients."

It takes five days for Orion to set-up a GIS application at a cost of \$35,000 to \$40,000.



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Shafik Jiwani, vice-president of Orion Technology, shows off one of the Internet illustrations his firm has designed for the Town of Markham's website. "We saw a niche and we capitalized on it," he says.

Jiwani said a GIS system saves municipalities money in the long run.

Rather than have clerks tied up on the phone dealing with inquires, clients can access the information themselves anytime on the web.

Markham's director of strategic planning and quality Stephen Chait agrees. The city wanted to use its website as a promotional tool for investors.

"In promoting ourselves we found it frustrating we were (limited) 9 to 5," he said.

"Now we have the service 24 hours a day and 365 days a year. It's been a real hit with customers."

The Markham website allows the user to cross-reference large amounts of geographic data.

For example, if a person wants to find out the location of the top 100 employers in Markham they can call it up on the site.

Should the user want to cross-refer-

See ORION'S, page 35.

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