

# Well-seasoned Engineering Student Gets New Business Experience at Innovative Biotech Company Outbreaker Solutions

If there was ever a time to market a revolutionary anti-microbial product specifically purposed to stop the spread of germs and pathogens on public surfaces, it's now. This is exactly what the Edmonton-based team at Outbreaker Solutions has their hands on; literally. Their surface-like products look to replace traditional touch spots such as metal door handles and consist of a highly-condensed, surprisingly simple primary ingredient, salt.

When the original product inventor formulated the concept many years ago, company founders had no idea just how relevant their products would become. The uptick in interest and activity for the company throughout the covid-19 pandemic meant the team was looking to bring more hands-on deck.

"With the momentum we got through covid, we were tackling a lot of different business development projects and wanted to be able to work with somebody who would be able to help us out on that front," said Matt Hodgson, Outbreaker Solutions co-founder and director of business development. "We thought we were in a good position to show somebody interested in start-ups what it's like at this stage."

Hodgson and his team applied for the Boosting Biotech Internship program to hire on a student for the winter semester of 2021. An initiative built to help small to medium sized biotech companies bring on new students, the internship program is a collaborative funding approach by BioAlberta and Innovative Medicines Canada. Through this program, they



*As part of the Outbreaker Solutions team, student Emma Li says: "For so many start-ups, all they need is that little extra support and push in the right direction, and they can find really great students to help them. I just think this initiative is fantastic. It helps the community, and Alberta's start-up world. I'm really, really grateful to (BioAlberta) have had this opportunity."*

found fourth-year materials engineering student Emma Li who was keen to take on the role and expand her education horizons from engineering into the world of business development.

“Before this internship, I was really just focused on engineering,” Li said. “So I got my eyes opened to the business world, and I realized a lot of engineers pursue an MBA after they graduate their bachelors. Engineering has a lot of aspects that deal with business too, so that opened my eyes to different possibilities for my future career.”

Hodgson said as the company works towards regulatory approval to launch their anti-microbial, salt-based products, Li was instrumental in helping with many projects that will ultimately help them reach their goals faster. One project in particular was a large grant application she helped write for Innovative Solutions Canada, which the company recently found out they pre-qualified for.

It wasn't just the business stuff Li was instrumental in, however, she said Matt also utilized her more well-seasoned skills as a materials engineering student to help with prototype development. This process of developing new skills and interests in students is something Hodgson said he loves, and, as a business graduate himself, is hoping to offer more for emerging engineering and science students.

“I really enjoy it [mentoring students]. I think it's such a mutually beneficial relationship,” he said. “I particularly enjoy showing students what it's like to be in a start-up like ours. Especially going through school, you hear about start-up companies and what it's like to be an entrepreneur, but actually being able to get a glimpse into that life, even if it's just for an internship for a few months, I think it's a great way to show some of that real world experience in a new way you just really aren't going to get just from traditional coursework.”

Fostering this kind of growth and experience in students, Hodgson said, is a key aspect to continuing growth and innovation for the life sciences sector in Alberta.

“We're going to need students who are often coming into companies with the latest understanding of technology, processes and some of the latest research,” he said. “They're probably some of the best conduits to helping get new technologies commercialized into the 'real world' so to speak.”


For Li, this experience means a broadened career scope on top of getting the necessary real-world experience she needed to inspire the final year of her studies. Opportunities like these, she said, are as vital to start-ups across the province as they are to students.

“I definitely don’t think my position would’ve been made available if it wasn’t for BioAlberta,” she said. “For so many start-ups, all they need is that little extra support and push in the right direction, and they can find really great students to help them. I just think this initiative is fantastic. It helps the community, and Alberta’s start-up world. I’m really, really grateful to have had this opportunity.”

# Boosting Biotech

The Boosting Biotech initiative is a collaboration of BioAlberta, Innovative Medicines Canada, the Alberta Government, and Western Economic Diversification to support innovation and commercialization of discoveries by Alberta researchers and small and medium sized enterprises in the life sciences sector through experiential learning opportunities.

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