

Ian Aaron

Fort Lauderdale, Florida



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Learn about Florida Entrepreneur Ian Aaron:

Imagine a world where connectivity, infrastructure monitoring, energy efficiency, artificial intelligence and security all collide to produce smart cities working to save lives, cut costs, reduce our carbon footprint, detect natural disasters, apprehend criminals, improve traffic congestion and even bridge the digital divide. That world is here and now – and it's brought to you by Ubicquia.

With an estimated 360 million streetlights worldwide, Ubicquia, led by veteran tech executive Ian Aaron, is utilizing existing streetlight infrastructure to upgrade and create “smart” cities overnight. Aaron shared the remarkable story behind his entrepreneurial journey and how, thanks to patented technology that simply plugs into streetlight photocell sockets, Ubicquia has quickly positioned itself as a key player

in a burgeoning industry.

“I grew up in Chicago and, despite spending a lot of time on the west coast, I still like to think of myself as a hardcore Midwesterner,” Aaron said. “I graduated from The University of Illinois with a degree in Electrical Engineering and started my career with General Telephone & Electronics (GTE), before they merged with Bell Atlantic and formed Verizon. I was initially in R&D before moving to Stanford, where I transitioned to the corporate side of things. After the divestiture, I started my own telecom system integration business and sold it to Softnet Systems in 1994. While I thought I would spend a year in transition, I ended up running for the next 6 years the division that helped Cable operators get into the cable modem business that eventually became the focus for the company.”

Aaron added, “We took Softnet Systems from the American Stock Exchange (AMEX) to the NASDAQ and raised over \$400M in public and private financing during a time when fiber and cable broadband companies were raising billions of dollars in the public and private markets.”

Aaron got a call from Morgan Stanley’s Managing Director, Jeff Sine (now Partner and Co-founder for global investment bank Raine), about an opportunity to help revive a distressed company in the digital infrastructure space for cable operators. He moved to Los Angeles and over the next three years turned that company – TVN Entertainment – into a leading Video-On-Demand platform for cable, telecom and CE companies.

While at TVN, Aaron was recruited by Gemstar CEO Jeff Shell (now CEO

of NBC Universal) to be the CEO of Gemstar's TV Guide branded products including TV Guide Channel, TV Guide Interactive and TV Guide On Demand.

"We had an amazing turnaround at Gemstar," Aaron said, "That centered around creating and executing on new patent strategy that drove more than \$1 Billion in licensing revenue in 24 months. We went from patent litigation with major cable operators to being a partner. We even created a joint venture with Comcast called Guideworks to focus on next generation user experiences for the cable industry. Eventually Gemstar was sold to Macrovision (Rovi) for \$2.6 Billion."

With experience in turning around technology companies in transition, Aaron was recruited to be a Director at Pictometry International Corporation – an aerial imaging company with a fleet of 75 planes that crisscrossed the US providing valuable imaging for municipalities, utilities and telecom companies. While there were many use-cases for the imaging with planners, property assessors and utility companies, the key use case evolved into helping the insurance companies process homeowner claims from roofs being destroyed after storms. Eventually he became Chairman and helped the company navigate a \$62 million Private Equity financing merger with EagleView Technologies and a sell to Vista Equity Partners for more than \$700 million.

Not long after the sale of EagleView to Vista, Aaron received a call from his high school friend of 40 years Lowell Kraff (co-founder of Merchant Bank Trivergance and Ubicquia Chairman) about an opportunity with a company in need of a leader and a strategy.

"We met in December 2016 to discuss the opportunity," Aaron said.

“Lowell had previous success acquiring other technology companies such as Hughes Telematics and selling it to Verizon for more than \$700 million so I wanted to learn more. Trivergance acquired Ubicquia from the original founders a few years prior where it was more of a ‘development house’ doing projects around IoT sensors. Between some changes in strategy and management, I told Lowell that I would take a deeper dive. I spent three months speaking with my contacts in the mobile, cable, and municipal sectors, developing a strategy that leveraged the photocell socket on a streetlight not just to control the lights but also to provide public WiFi, to aid in public safety and to help the mobile operators accelerate 5G. We would be at an interesting intersection between the utilities, municipalities and the mobile operators and I had all of the relevant experience strategically, operationally and financially to create something significant.

As we are collaborating and competing with leading companies in the Lighting, Utility and Mobile sectors, I knew we needed to have a world class team. Being based in Fort Lauderdale, we have been fortunate to hire many senior engineering and finance executives from Motorola and Cisco. Our COO is Peter Aloumanis, a 23-year veteran from Motorola who served as Corporate VP of Product Development and Engineering and was the GM of Motorola’s iDEN business. Our Head of Engineering, Software Development, Program Management, Supply Chain and Manufacturing are all 20 plus year Motorola veterans. Our CFO, Santiago Serrano, was CFO for Cisco Systems Latin America for 13 years before joining our team. While I spent 8 years in Silicon Valley, I can’t think of a better place for a leading technology company than our location in Fort Lauderdale.

As a testament to what we are building, we have also been able to attract a world class board from mobile, utility and finance sectors. Our Vice Chairman is Ralph de la Vega who spent 42 years at AT&T including as the CEO of AT&T Mobile where he launched the iPhone with Apple and grew the business to \$70B in annual revenue. Jim Perry who has been one of the most prolific telecom investors from Private Equity firm Madison Dearborn and Alex Weiss who was the Chief Investment Officer of Next Era and started the Power and Technology growth equity Fund Clear Sky. For entrepreneurs, the board not only brings credibility to our business but provides invaluable input based on their relationships and years of experience.”

From the start, Aaron’s focus has always been on the “pole position.” The 360 million streetlights across the globe all share a common socket. Whether you’re in Chile, The United Kingdom or the United States, they’re nearly identical. By utilizing existing infrastructure, and by “drafting” behind LED conversations around energy cost savings, Ubicquia first developed and implemented a product that allows cities to automatically control streetlights. The device also measures the energy use of the streetlight and quality of the power at the street, giving utilities a more granular view of what’s happening with the power grid every 50 meters. From the ability to remotely turn on and off streetlights came other applications.

“The technology also allows cities to understand and monitor pedestrian counts, congestion and traffic,” Aaron said. “We’ve integrated high accuracy tilt and vibration sensors to monitor impact to critical infrastructure from hurricanes to earthquakes. We have even incorporated technology where our controller can be used as a hub for

cities to connect and scale sensors for air quality and water level monitoring. From the original application, we expanded our focus to bridging the digital divide. Cities want and need to make broadband available to everyone. By utilizing Qualcomm Wi-Fi 6 technology, we were able to develop a device that can be installed in 15 minutes and at a price point such that cities can densify and scale public Wi-Fi. We even launched our first CBRS small cell for Private LTE and recently installed it in the City of Las Vegas to help bring broadband to disenfranchised areas."

From a project in Mexico involving 18,000 "smart" street lights that generate a savings of nearly \$3 million per year to cameras in San Diego that have helped solve more than 380 violent crimes over the past 18 months, Ubicquia's cost-effective and highly-scalable devices are producing tangible results and saving cities millions of dollars annually that can fuel other critical infrastructure programs.

Over the past year, Ubicquia has doubled the size of its team and anticipates adding 50 more employees by early fall of 2021. They've also acquired \$30 Million in a Series C round with several investors including Fuel Venture Capital – a South Florida venture capital firm investing in exponential organizations with groundbreaking ideas and innovations. With incredible forward-momentum and a team of dedicated professionals focused on making our cities more intelligent, Ubicquia has provided Aaron with a rewarding opportunity to make impactful and lasting changes to the way we live, commute, and prosper, while preserving our natural resources.

"I love what I do," he said. "The fact that I get to wake up and work with

an amazing team of talented people to build and deploy products together that make cities smarter, safer and more connected is incredibly rewarding.”

Looking ahead, Aaron and the team at Ubicquia are focused on riding the wave of LED light conversions – to effectively deploy their “plug in play” devices in as many cities as possible – and supporting the federal government’s goal of being the leader in 5G technology and deployment. Ubicquia’s hub with integrated artificial intelligence and cameras has the ability to run Qualcomm’s C-V2X technology – a combination that will allow cities to deploy Vehicle-to-Infrastructure (V2I) communications to enable the use of autonomous shuttles in the coming years.

Earlier this year, Ubicquia acquired leading smart city platform CityIQ from GE Current. The acquisition gives Ubicquia access to cutting-edge artificial intelligence technology to deliver even more tangible results. Whether it’s understanding and evaluating how people utilize bike lanes – in an effort to get more people to ride bikes and reduce our carbon footprint – or eliminating near misses at pedestrian crosswalks, the technology is providing valuable data and insight that was not previously available.

“There are so many opportunities to leverage AI for good,” Aaron said. “However, it’s also a very interesting time politically and socially with a number of different privacy and surveillance concerns. We’re seeing police budgets being restructured and people’s perceptions of surveillance being influenced by what’s happening. Nevertheless, more and more cities are adopting policies around privacy and surveillance

services and they're bringing together all the stakeholders including residential groups, city councils and police departments to develop best practices."

Aaron added, "The CIO of the City of Los Angeles, Ted Ross, recently commented that 'technology is enabling transparency in policing and how it's giving a powerful voice to diverse communities.' That city is a leader in leveraging smart technology and Ross' comment was spot on."

What advice does Aaron have for aspiring entrepreneurs and those looking to fund their ideas? "While developing these products, we had sponsors that are thought-leaders in the industry," he said. "It wasn't just about a streetlight controller – it was about working with utilities to understand how that position could be more valuable to them. Even our Small Cell collaboration with AT&T was about understanding how Ubiqquia could be more valuable in solving small cell deployment challenges. Entrepreneurs often have great ideas, but then they go off on their own. It's important to not develop your products or services in a vacuum. I'm also a big fan of mentors. You'd be amazed at how many successful executives and entrepreneurs are receptive to mentoring."

Aaron added, "In terms of specific advice when it comes to raising capital, the most important thing to do is focus your initial efforts on one product or area. You'll see entrepreneurs that have a tendency to expand their scope thinking it will make it easier to raise capital. Stay true to your position and focus on creating world class products in your space."

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