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## KANSAS CITY BUSINESS JOURNAL

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# EcoFit lights the way for growth

Firm rides a rising wave of energy-efficient lighting

Kansas City Business Journal - by [David Twiddy](#) Staff Writer

Lenexa-based **EcoFit Lighting**'s leaders hope that 2010 is the year the company flips the switch from being a small startup to becoming a key player in the growing and highly competitive energy-efficient lighting industry.

The pieces appear to be there: Full-scale production of its LED-based technology began at a Lee's Summit factory in December, more than 60 cities are using EcoFit lights in pilot projects, and outside investors have poured in about \$1.5 million in the past two months.

EcoFit CEO Cason Coplin said the company should generate \$10 million in revenue this year, compared with sales in the "tens of thousands" in 2009.

"We are fully launched and ready to go," he said. "As of today, we are in the middle of about 10 (requests for proposals). In the next few months, we expect to hear back that we, hopefully, have won some big deals."

But the going may not be easy. In Houston, EcoFit is competing with 12 companies as part of a six-month study of alternative streetlight technology. Eleven of them, including EcoFit, are using LED lights, and two are using induction lights, a technology that powers the bulb with electromagnetic currents instead of through electrodes.

**CenterPoint Energy**, which oversees Houston's almost 400,000 streetlights, will pick a handful of products later this year to begin selling to the city, homeowners' groups and developers either as new or replacement lights.

"We're in the middle of that evaluation process right now," said Chris Oliver, manager of streetlight operations for CenterPoint. "I can't really say who's No. 1 and who's No. 13.

"I think all municipalities are taking a look (at energy efficiency), whether they own the lights themselves or they're paying an electric distribution company."

### MEDIA



At the other end of the spectrum, in 1,100-person Anita, Iowa, people such as municipal utilities superintendent Merlin Scarf are on the fence. He's installed four EcoFit lights so far.

"I just want to kind of get a feeling for what the LED lighting is going to be like and how well the public accepts it," Scarf said. "I've had some compliments, and I've had some people tell me we should take it down again."

Coplin acknowledged that the "green" push still is getting up to speed and that EcoFit will have to work hard not to be left behind. But he said its technology is different enough, as is its sales pitch that customers can use EcoFit's product to replace the guts of existing streetlights instead of building new ones.

"We still remain the only viable retrofitting product in the marketplace," he said. "There's that environmental issue that's pretty compelling to people."

Coplin also is looking at new markets, approaching owners of parking facilities, which use an estimated 60 million lights, compared with 35 million streetlights.

He said his manufacturer, **Progress Instruments Inc.**, can produce as many as 10,000 units a month, so scaling up won't be a problem, especially with the influx of cash from outside investors.

Mid-America Angels, a regional angel investment group, provided about \$500,000 in December and January, said Joel Wiggins, the group's executive director, and **Kansas Technology Enterprise Corp.**, which promotes tech-based economic development, provided an additional \$50,000. The rest came from other private investment, Coplin said.

Kevin Carr, KTEC's interim CEO, said the state-supported agency has given a total of \$250,000 since EcoFit started.

"We're trying to fund what I would call game changers that help put this region on the map in terms of building our economy and being real anchors and generating business for other companies in the region," Carr said. "What's attractive about the company is it's involved in a truly innovative product. It's not an incremental improvement. ... It's something that could truly change industrial and municipal lighting."

EcoFit remains a small operation, operating out of the Enterprise Center of Johnson County incubator with four full-time workers. But Coplin expects to hire more back-office employees this year and people to help with customer service and tech support.

He also said he's happy to see the company moving from being built around an idea to being centered on actual sales.

"We're getting a great deal of self-satisfaction from seeing some actual market validation that people really want this product," he said. "The country truly is moving in a more energy-efficient direction as opposed to just talking about it. That's a really good feeling."

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