



# Indsights

A Window into the Indigenous Economy

Case Study

# Nipiy Industries

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# Nipiy Industries

# Meet Jason

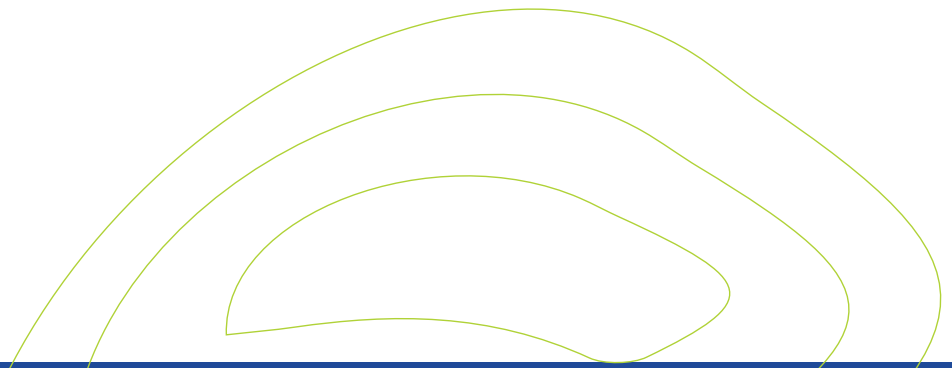


## Meet Jason

Jason Lizotte founded Nipiy Industries, a 100% Indigenous-owned business located in Grand Prairie, Alberta. Nipiy Industries manufactures solar-powered hand-sanitization stations that are found in a variety of industries across Alberta. In 2003, Jason graduated from welding school and spent nearly 20 years as a welder, creating his own welding business – Silverline Welding.

Jason credits his upbringing and family as influences for starting his businesses. His parents ran successful businesses while growing up in Paddle Prairie, a small Métis settlement in northern Alberta.

He enjoys spending time with his fiancée and their children. They like to fish, camp, and golf. He grew up playing hockey and still holds a love for the game. He hopes to instill the same values in his children that he learned growing up and provide them with experiences and opportunities that he didn't have in his youth. That's what motivated Jason to become an entrepreneur.



# The Inspiration Behind Starting Nipiy Industries



## The Inspiration Behind Starting Nipiy Industries

Jason has always envisioned himself as an inventor, and it dawned on him one day while filling his gas tank at a gas station: Why aren't there hand-washing stations? He saw this as a need, particularly on job sites in remote regions that serve the oil and gas industry, gas plants, and mills. He saw no reason these gas stations could not be outfitted with their own mobile, solar-powered hand-cleaning station.

*"Every gas station has a canopy on it. So, I thought, why can't we put a solar panel up there, and have a fully automated system down here? You could recapture the rainwater and use that water to wash your hands. And, you know, it makes the world a safer place."*



Jason began developing his prototype after researching various patents and ensuring no similar product was on the market. He eventually launched his first patent-protected hand-washing station in a mine in southern Alberta and received positive reviews and feedback. From there, Nipiy Industries was born.

*"We built that prototype, and I did not want to bring it out until I was [patent] protected because this thing has not been seen before, and there is nothing like it. So, I did not want to bring it to the public and have somebody steal the idea or do something else with it. With that, we filed for patent protection. Once we obtained patent pending status, I brought that prototype out, and I took it to a job site."*

*The tech mines in Sparwood were good because they were coal mines and were really dirty places. I thought it was utilized well there and got great reviews."*



## Products

Nipiy Industries manufactures four different solar-powered sanitation stations. They include the standalone safety sink (standard model), a children's version safety sink, a combination of the adult and children's version in one station, and a construction site model that includes additional safety features for chemical burns, an eyewash kit, first aid kit, safety shower, and fire extinguisher.

All models are free-standing and self-contained. They are touchless and motion activated, with no-drip soap dispensers and water taps. Each station is built with sustainability in mind; the machines draw their power from the attached solar panel, and the soaps and paper used are biodegradable and non-toxic. They also use large freshwater tanks that help reduce the use of plastic.

All Nipiy Industries' products can be purchased as standalone units or are available for rent. Rental packages include full service and maintenance during the rental period.

Currently, models can be found across a variety of locations in Alberta. They have been seen at festivals, tourist sites, schools and daycares, construction sites, and infrastructure development sites.



# Market Background

## Market Background

### Importance of Hand Sanitation

Hand sanitization takes centre stage in health and wellness as a crucial measure for promoting public health. Positioned as a frontline defence against unseen threats, it acts as a robust shield, protecting individuals and their families from the potential dangers of harmful microbes.

Imagine a bustling environment filled with daily activities and shared surfaces. In this dynamic setting, microbes linger, ready to hitch a ride on unwashed hands, seamlessly transferring from person to person like subtle nomads. Think of hand washing as a superhero move, effectively preventing the spread of bacteria and viruses that cause infections. Microbes patiently wait on surfaces, seeking opportunities to invade through facial touch, food preparation, or simple social gestures like handshakes (CDC, 2022).

Hand hygiene practices call for the strategic use of soap and water at critical moments — before, during, and after food preparation, before and after meals, and especially when caring for a sick individual or managing cuts and wounds. Other crucial instances for handwashing include using the toilet, changing diapers, and handling pet-related responsibilities. In the absence of traditional handwashing, hand sanitizer with 60% alcohol provides a portable solution for hand cleansing (CDC, 2022).

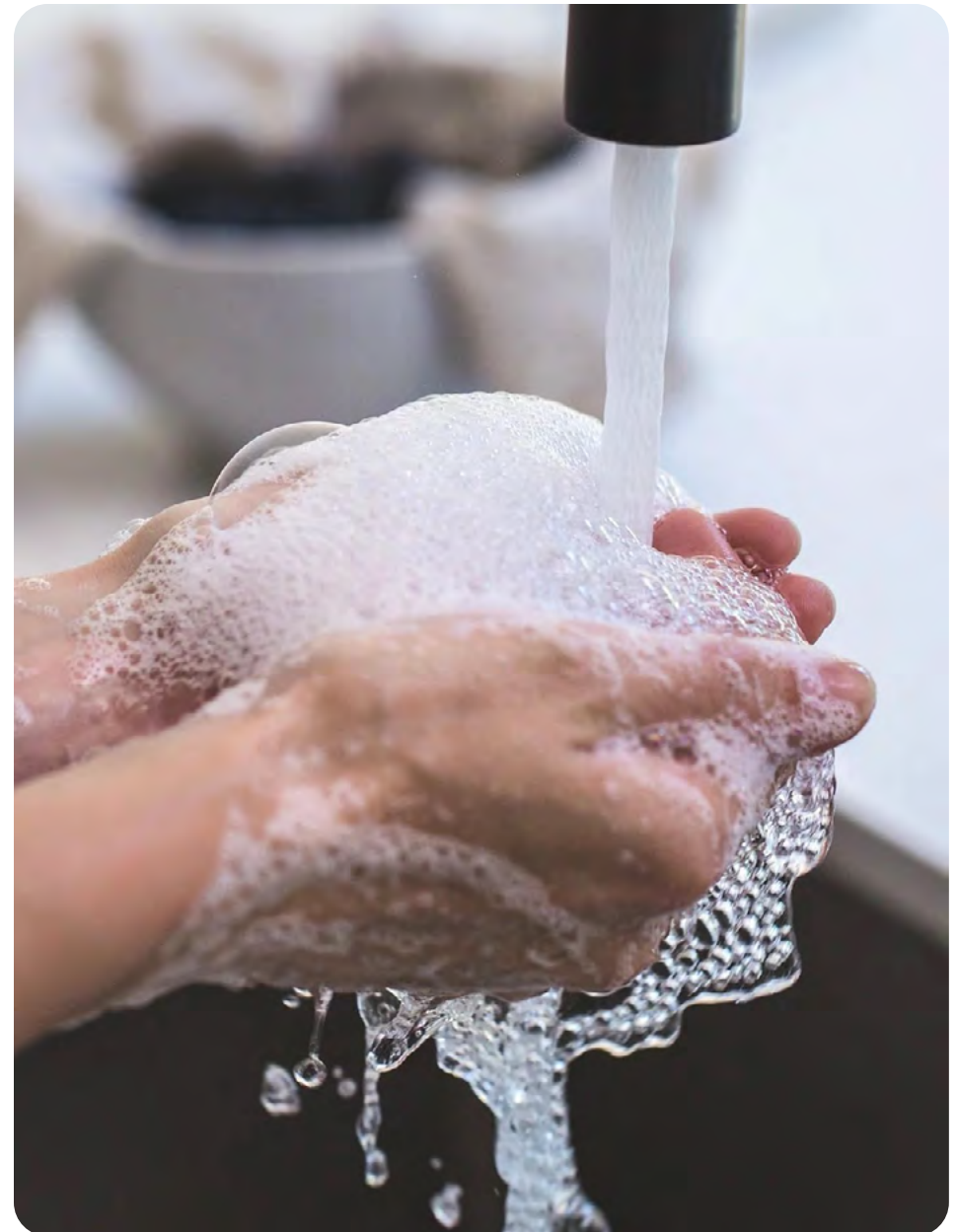


# Market Background

Effective hand washing with soap and water is a powerful yet straightforward measure to halt the spread of germs and maintain good health, preventing one in three diarrheal cases and one in five respiratory infections, including the common cold and flu (CDC, 2023). Moreover, its simplicity and affordability make it a valuable tool in reducing illnesses among young children (CDC, 2023).

Educating communities about hand washing yields impressive results, with studies indicating a potential reduction of 23%–40% in diarrheal illnesses, a decrease of 29%–57% in missed school days due to gastrointestinal issues among children, and a 58% decrease in diarrheal illnesses for individuals with weakened immune systems (CDC, 2023). Additionally, the population can experience a notable reduction of 16%–21% in respiratory illnesses, such as colds, through the promotion of hand-washing practices (CDC, 2023).

More broadly, routine actions become crucial contributors to a public health defence mechanism. Hand sanitization goes beyond personal well-being, becoming a collective effort to build a barrier against illness. In pursuing health and safety, cleanliness becomes a personal choice and a shared responsibility for the greater good (CDC, 2022).





# Market Background

## Hand Sanitization Stations: Market Outlook

The demand for hand-wash stations has risen thanks to collaborative efforts from government initiatives, communities, and NGOs responding to outbreaks like the COVID-19 pandemic. These entities have joined forces to spread awareness about airborne diseases and the value of practicing effective, regular hand washing and sanitizing to combat exposure. These continued efforts are empowering people to protect themselves.

Marketing campaigns have effectively conveyed the importance of hand washing in reducing the transmission of airborne viruses. Consequently, the hand-washing station market is experiencing growth as individuals become more cognizant of these infections and the products, they can use to stay protected (Straits Research, 2023). A prime example of this is measures taken by governments and corporations during COVID-19 outbreaks. They installed hand-washing facilities in high-density locations such as airports, hospitals, hotels, bus terminals, train stations, restaurants, independent shops, business centres, industrial facilities, and temples (Straits Research, 2023).

The hand-washing station market is categorized into two main groups based on the intended usage by end users. The first group comprises commercial locations such as hotels, eateries, corporate buildings, businesses, and hospitals. The second group includes community locations where people typically gather socially or move between different places, such as parks, grocery stores, pharmacies, recreation centres, and workplaces. The commercial sector has witnessed ongoing innovation and a



surge in product launches. Meanwhile, in the community segment, governments have strategically placed hand-washing facilities in public areas to encourage hand hygiene, particularly in response to heightened awareness of airborne health infections, notably in the prevention of diseases like COVID-19 (Straits Research, 2023).

Between 2012 and 2022, there has been a 30% rise in the proportion of individuals with access to essential hand-washing facilities (Global Handwashing Day, 2023). In 2022, the worldwide market for hand-wash stations reached a valuation of US\$ 1.01 billion, with projections indicating a growth to US\$ 1.4 billion by 2031 (Straits Research, 2023). The key players in the global market consist primarily of American companies including Acorn Engineering, Belson Outdoors, Crown Verity, JW Craft Portable Restrooms, Meritech System, Monsam Enterprises, Polyjohn Enterprises, Satellite Industries, Teal Patents, and Texas Waste (Straits Research, 2023).



## Successes

An early success for Jason and Nipiy Industries was being granted a utility patent in the United States and Canada. According to the US Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO), a utility patent is issued for inventing a new and useful process, machine, manufacture, or composition of matter and it permits the owner to exclude others from making, using, or selling the invention for a period, typically up to 20 years (Nonprovisional (Utility) Patent Application Filing Guide, 2023).

*“From having an idea, sketching it at my kitchen table, bringing it to life, along with being granted patent rights has been one of my biggest successes.”*

Jason was fortunate to have the opportunity to promote his business in various pitch contests across Canada and has won three to date: Kamploopa Pitch Pow Wow, Shell live WIRE, and the Elevate Up pitch contest. He also appeared on the TV show Bears Lair, which is a nationally televised program that showcases Indigenous entrepreneurs and their inventions in Canada like Shark Tank. Nipiy Industries was also awarded the Indigenous Distinction Award from the Grand Prairie Chamber of Commerce. These were invaluable experiences and promotions for Jason and Nipiy Industries. From a personal standpoint, Jason was able to work on his public speaking, presentation, marketing, and networking skills — all critical components of growing his business.

# Successes

*“Coming from a welding background, I am new to this whole business entrepreneur thing.*

*I only started this three years ago and then started these pitch contests. They are exciting and very intimidating because I do not have experience in these things and do not know what I am doing. I have learned how to speak better in public, do interviews, and cope with being out of my comfort zone.*

*I have learned to overcome that through these pitch contests because, you know, there are so many people watching you, and then you get used to it.”*

With these networking opportunities and brand awareness came the opportunity to connect with local Indigenous community leaders and other business leaders in the region, resulting in new growth for the business. The North Peace Tribal Council purchased three children’s stations for daycares in the area, and the Métis Nation of Alberta purchased an adult and children’s combo unit for their tourism sites and petting zoo.

*“We have been working with quite a few clients. The first was the Métis Nation of Alberta.*

*They have been a big supporter of ours. They have bought our machines. They have rented them. They continuously promote them. Same with North Peace Tribal Council, their Indigenous Tribal Council of Northern Alberta, where they bought our children’s machines, and they love them.”*

*“We have sold over 15 units and continue to grow revenue in our rental and maintenance services.”*





# Growth Opportunities



## Growth Opportunities

As an entrepreneur, Jason thinks it is essential to dream big, and he has ambitious goals for Nipiy Industries. One day, he hopes to partner with a larger company, such as Green for Life, to sell or rent his products across Canada. For Jason and Nipiy Industries, this would be a natural fit because of both company's commitment to environmental initiatives and clean energy.

Jason also envisions seeing his products at every gas station across North America and, ultimately, around the world — in a way, a full circle moment for Jason and his inspiration in developing these products.

*“I think my biggest dream, and why I built this thing, is to have my product at every gas, every refuelling station across North America, whether that company be Shell, Esso, you know, various petroleum companies. That would be my dream client because you can expand from there, not only in North America but globally.”*



There are talks of developing a fifth product. Jason is currently designing a wheelchair-accessible model and hoping to have it ready for the market soon.

Ultimately, Jason sees Nipiy Industries becoming a fully sustainable manufacturing company while inspiring future entrepreneurs.

*“I see this being a fully sustainable manufacturing company supplying global demand.*

*That is what I am working towards. That is what we want to do. I want to have partners and relationships with numerous companies. We also want to inspire the youth and show them how to chase their dreams and goals. That is what our company represents.”*

# Challenges

## Challenges

Like many entrepreneurs, Jason has multiple businesses and other commitments to fulfill. Balancing these priorities can be difficult at times, particularly for a business that is not self-sustained and requires funding from other income sources to remain fully operational.

*“Right now, I have two careers and two companies. It has been a challenge to juggle both and being able to say okay, well, I got to be able to commit to Nipiy for four or five months. We are not established enough right now, and we do not have that big market support right now, which we are working on to be fully sustainable and make a living off these things because the welding company does most of the funding for it.”*

Jason recognizes that it is essential to scale his business slowly to ensure he does not get in over his head. Currently, all the hand sanitization stations are made to order, and he keeps a small inventory of 10 machines for rentals and service calls.

*“That is the main reason we have not scaled up, but it is like it is: I do not want to bite off more than I can chew. I do not want to go and make a hundred of these things, and suddenly nobody wants to buy [our product], and I am going to sit on a huge capital investment without sales.”*





# Differentiating Nipiy Industries from the Competition

## Differentiating Nipiy Industries from the Competition

Other popular versions of portable hand-washing stations on the market involve a foot pump and oftentimes require you to physically touch the soap dispenser. They also have design limitations that make it difficult to determine how much water is left in the station. To address these, Jason designed his models to be fully automated — you do not have to touch anything. His models also include a sightline for the water tanks, making it easier to see how much water is left.

Nipiy Industries' models can also be set up for use anywhere due to the solar panel used to power the station. Other hand-washing stations require a fuel source, such as electricity or a generator, to operate. Nipiy Industries has removed the need to be plugged into the grid or rely on additional fuel resources.

Jason is also looking into adding Bluetooth features to the hand-washing stations, making monitoring the unit's various components easier. This feature will further separate Nipiy Industries' models from their competitors.

## Indigenous Heritage

Jason draws inspiration from his Cree heritage and incorporates the teachings and knowledge he learned as a child into his business. For instance, the word Nipiy is Cree for water. He also draws upon his Cree teachings on living clean and credits this as his inspiration for incorporating cleaner technology into his designs.

*"I wanted to bring something out to help inspire my culture, my people, and to have these key components, like clean energy from the sun, and having safety, taking care of communities, helping the Elders, helping the disabled, helping the children. So that is where my Indigenous heritage ties into my company."*

Jason recognizes the role Nipiy Industries can play in helping industries that are typically not perceived as being a sustainable transition to cleaner technology. For example, he has had conversations with large oil producers to help them make small changes to their energy consumption. This is important to Jason because of how he was raised, and the emphasis placed on caring for your environment and preserving mother nature.

*"It is important for us being especially from an Indigenous background because we grew up [living] off the land being sustainable, and preserving the Mother Earth, it is big for us [as a community]."*

# Indigenous Heritage

Jason also credits his Cree heritage as the inspiration for giving back to his communities. After the discovery of the mass graves at various residential schools across Canada, Jason knew he had to act to help raise awareness surrounding these legacies while providing a safe and open space for dialogue around reconciliation. His children's hand-washing stations are painted bright orange and include the "Every Child Matters" motto. He sees these as an avenue to help raise awareness about these atrocities. He hopes to inspire non-Indigenous people to take the steps needed to learn more about the Residential School System and the impact it has had on Indigenous Peoples across Canada.

*"We are doing our due diligence by keeping everybody aware [of these issues], our identity, our culture, and the things that have happened. So, I put it out there, and it has "Every Child Matters" on it because that is the residential school [motto]."*

During the wildfires in the summer of 2023, Jason partnered with the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Rupertsland Institute to deliver supplies to the wildfire evacuees in Fox Lake. His willingness and dedication to help his community are at the heart of what Nipiy Industries believes in and strives to achieve.

*"It was very sad to see all the people evacuated and unsure if their homes and belongings would survive the fire. But it was also very heartwarming to see all the support from the surrounding communities, and I was extremely happy to help in any way I could."*



# Advice for Future Entrepreneurs

## Advice for Future Entrepreneurs

Jason has a wealth of knowledge and experiences to share and offers excellent advice for those looking to start their entrepreneurial journey.

First — ask for help.

*“Do not be afraid to ask for help. That is a big one. Help is a huge one. You cannot do everything on your own.”*

Second — take chances.

*“Do not be afraid to take chances. You will have to take these chances because if you do not, someone else will. You cannot get anywhere if you do not take a chance.”*

Third — make sure you do your research.

*“Do your research. Do your background research and marketing research. You do not want to come up with a product that’s been done 100 times over and cannot be sold. You have to do that research on your product.”*

Fourth — build your support system and network.

*“Do as much networking as you can. Make as many contacts as possible and keep in touch with these contacts. Have a good support group behind you. Always have people supporting you.”*

Having these in place will help with your confidence, and Jason believes these will help when venturing out on your own. A great support system will help in the uncomfortable moments that require you to step out of your comfort zone.

*“You are going to have to step out of your comfort zone. So that is where your support group and your networking are. There are always people out there that’ll help you. Good people will want you to succeed.”*

Lastly, Jason recommends taking advantage of any potential resources or opportunities. Jason credits the pitch competitions and the business classes and courses he participated in as crucial components to the success of Nipiy Industries.

*“Many resources that I used, these pitch contests, I would not be where I am [today] without them. Get into those business workshops. Like anything that will help your company, try your hardest to do it. Do the workshops, do the classes. We just went through a trade accelerator program course. That is a good resource for us because now we are on a path to go global. So, take full advantage of any resource that is offered. Because even if you do not take everything away, you might take that one thing away that will help you.”*





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# Acknowledgements

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# Indsights

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