



Pictured Above: The Yakabod team at the 2019 Tour de Frederick.



BUSINESS PROFILE

WHERE TRANSPORTATION MEETS VALUES: THE YAKABOD STORY

In early 2018, Yakabod, a software development company, moved into its new headquarters in downtown Frederick, MD. The location, in a renovated red-brick warehouse steps from Carroll Creek, was perfect for the dynamic and growing company, offering them a space tailor-made for their collaborative approach to software. There was only one problem: “We wanted our employees to feel connected to downtown Frederick, to be able to walk around there and get lunch,” says co-founder and CEO Scott Ryser. But many employees found that the core of downtown was just a bit too far away.

To solve this problem, Yakabod looked to a solution that it knew its employees would embrace: bicycles. “We’re active and adventurous,” says Ryser, “and many of us enjoy biking outside of work.” Yakabod already sponsored a team in the Tour de Frederick, an annual cycling event benefiting the local Boys and Girls Clubs. A number of their employees participated in the annual Bike to Work Day. Additionally, many of their employees would get together after work or on the weekends to ride on one of the many bike trails around Frederick.

Yakabod started small: they bought a few inexpensive cruiser bicycles and let all Yakabod employees borrow them free of charge. The cruiser bikes were an instant hit. Yakabod employees started borrowing them to get lunch and run errands and found that they were a great way to avoid sitting in traffic around town. For a few employees, the cruiser bikes even served as an introduction to biking as a form of regular exercise and recreation. “It wasn’t a big step to buy a few bikes,” Ryser says, “but it had a big impact for our employees.”

Yakabod also offers bike storage and shower facilities for employees who commute by bike, as well as one that sometimes commutes on a OneWheel electric skateboard. Yakabod’s efforts have earned it a Bicycle Friendly Business designation from the League of American Bicyclists, an honor given to only 27 businesses in Maryland.

The bikes have also proven to be a boon for Yakabod’s employee recruitment efforts, as Ryser puts it: “The bikes contribute to our vibrant office culture, which attracts great talent. The people we’re looking to hire want to work here.” But more importantly to Ryser, it all fits naturally with Yakabod’s values. “We make software that helps people collaborate, so it didn’t make sense to us to be in a suburban office park somewhere... we wanted to make it easier for our employees to explore the city, so we bought bikes.” To Ryser, the choices Yakabod made seemed like an obvious and clear fit for the kind of employees the company wanted to attract and the kind of business that Yakabod’s leaders wanted their company to be. “The adventurous, active culture we have as a tech startup, it comes naturally to us, it’s who we are,” Ryser says.

Yakabod’s executives believe that many companies can learn from their experience. For Yakabod, bicycling fit neatly into the company’s values and mission. Rather than seeing cycling as a solution for every business, they see it as a solution that worked for them and encourage every company to think about the transportation solutions that best fit with their own values. The key lesson, Ryser says, is to “be authentic. If it feels like a manufactured thing, your employees won’t do it.”

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