

How 2112 put Chicago's entertainment tech companies under one roof



[Sam Dewey](#) on Jul 12th, 2016



Tonight, the folks over at [2112](http://www.2112inc.com/) — Chicago's hub for innovation and tech in the entertainment industry — will celebrate the organization's one year anniversary.

And what a year it's been.

Scott Fetters, the organization's director, said the past year has seen the innovation hub grow into a cornerstone of the city's entertainment industry. Based out of Fort Knox Studios, the hub is modeled after tech incubators like 1871 in an effort to connect entertainment-focused entrepreneurs with other businesses and artists in the community.

"My goal was to figure out how to bring people together," Fetters said. "2112 became a physical manifestation of that work."

Fetters said 2112 already has about 75 member companies, each of which finds its roots in areas like video production, band management, editing and entertainment-focused technology. About 12 of the companies are tech-heavy, he said, including music tech startups like [Jammer](http://www.jammer.com/), [Mic Check](http://www.miccheck.co/), [VL Group](http://vlgroup.com/) and [Downwrite](https://www.downwrite.com/).

ideas have always been aplenty, but more often than not individuals worked independently. Fetters said there were few pockets of industry or live entertainment where business leaders, musicians, and technologists from the city could cross paths.

As a result of a disparate, disjointed community, Chicago suffered from a bit of a marketing problem, he said.

“Why is it that on paper Chicago [ranks] number three in almost every category across the creative industry, but everyone is talking about Nashville, Seattle, Austin, or Atlanta before they’re talking about Chicago?”

That’s where 2112 comes in. In addition to the targeted educational programming and mentorship opportunities it offers its members, Fetters said 2112’s value lies in the community it’s championing who can, collectively, reestablish Chicago’s position at the top of the pack.

“We’re doing something no one else in the world is doing. We’ve taken this incubator and surrounded it with 140,000 square feet of industry space in Fort Knox,” Fetters said. “As you’re growing your business, you’re interacting with the industry on a day to day business. You’re solving real-world market problems. Instead of building your app in a bubble, convincing yourself that you’re solving a market problem and then releasing it, you’re getting real-time feedback on a daily basis from the industry itself.”

With initiatives like those laid at 2112, things may be on the upswing. Fetters said he’s seeing people move to Chicago or locate their businesses here because of opportunities to break into the music industry — a public image he credits, at least in part, to the work going on at Fort Knox.

But Fetters’ interest in building connections in the music industry goes beyond connecting local entrepreneurs and artists on a micro-level. He said he’s focusing on bringing that matchmaking model to a global scale. By synergizing entire ecosystems — like Chicago’s authority in music licensing with Nashville’s expertise in publishing, for instance — connected, collaborative networks form and innovation thrives.

“That’s the point where we start really defining what the future of the music industry in general looks like,” Fetters said.

And that goal is already in the works. Fetters said he’s got a shortlist of about 10 other cities in contention for expansion plans, and today they’re announcing plans for their first international collaboration project in Reykjavik, Iceland.

For an organization celebrating its first birthday, that’s the cherry on top of a well-earned slice of cake.

Images via 2112.

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