

CLASSIFIEDS: CARS JOBS HOMES APARTMENTS CLASSIFIEDS SHOPPING E-CIRCULARS DAILY DEALS ADVERTISE SUBSCRIBE

News Sports Autos Business Life Entertainment Opinion USA Today

MORE: [Surviving Cancer: A special section](#) [Marathon](#) [eEdition](#) [Detroit bankruptcy](#)

Find what you are looking for ...

SEARCH

ADVERTISEMENT

James Scapa, Altair's quiet risk taker

1:20 PM, February 10, 2014

Recommend 14 people recommend this. Be the first of your friends.

A A



Purchase Image

Jim Scapa, CEO of AltAir Engineering, talks about what makes the Troy company successful 29 years after he established it. / Kimberly P. Mitchell/Detroit Free Press



By **Brent Snavelly**

Detroit Free Press
Business Writer

James Scapa, who founded Altair Engineering 29 years ago, said he is still just as energized about creating new software and new industrial designs today as he was when he founded the firm in the 1980s.

“We are risk-takers,” Scapa said of Altair Engineering. “I like to try new things. We do a lot of projects that I think a lot of other companies that are maybe very driven by the accountants would not do.”

FILED UNDER

[Business](#)
[Michigan Business](#)

ADVERTISEMENT
ADVERTISEMENT

michigan.COM **Now Hiring**

FEATURED JOBS THIS WEEK

Police Officer
The City of Ferndale
Ferndale, MI

Mechanics
Helmerich & Payne
Detroit, MI

Project Engineer
Hoffmann Filter
Corporaion
Brighton, MI

Wound Care Nurse RN
or LPN
Hartford Nusing and
Rehab Cente
Detroit, MI

PREVIOUS NEXT

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:
careerbuilder.com

Recruiters, showcase your positions here.

Scapa, 57, founded the company in 1985 as an engineering consulting firm.

Clad in black Nikes, jeans and a gray sweater, Scapa works to set a tone of collaboration and experimentation at Altair.

"I hope I don't take myself too seriously," said Scapa, Altair's chairman and CEO.

Over the past two decades, Scapa has built Altair into a global company with more than 2,000 employees in the U.S., Europe and Asia. Altair develops computer software used by the automotive, aerospace, government and defense, heavy equipment industries to design industrial products.

Altair's software programs, including OptiStruct and Inspire, allow companies to design everything from airplane wings to car parts and bikes.

While Altair's software sales generate about 75% of the company's revenue, Scapa likes to make sure the company's in-house engineers stay busy with Altair's own proprietary design projects that he calls "stretch projects."

In recent years, Altair has built a hydraulic hybrid bus, a motorcycle and even a football helmet.

Scapa said Altair could not find a manufacturer interested in building the bus. With no manufacturer, Altair almost decided to build it on its own until the company's board decided against the idea. But the bus, which is still sitting in the company's development lab, is far from a failure in Scapa's eyes.

The bus project led to the creation of a new lighting company called Toggled, which develops and produces advanced LED lights. In 2013, Toggled was awarded 21 patents. Toggled is a manufacturer of LED products for the replacement of fluorescent lighting.



Jim Scapa, CEO of Altair Engineering, looks at a video with colleague James Dagg. Altair's roots lie in automotive, but today the Troy company also serves the aerospace, government and defense, heavy equipment, consumer products, electronics, architecture engineering and construction, and energy industries. / Kimberly P. Mitchell/Detroit Free Press

Jim Scapa

Title: Chairman and CEO of Altair

Key career moments: Founded Altair in 1985 with two partners.

Began his career with Ford in 1978.

Education: bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering from Columbia University and a master of business administration from the University of Michigan.

Key quote: "I still have the same energy for what we do as a company as I did 25 years ago. I love the technology creation and I love the building of the company."



“I think this is part of our culture. We learn a lot from these projects,” Scapa said. “Even if we don’t succeed, the learning that is going on for us ... will be relevant in the rest of our work.”

In the 1990s, Altair expanded internationally and began establishing offices overseas in locations to serve its automotive clients.

Today, Altair employs about 350 in Troy and a total of about 800 in the U.S. while another 800 work in Asia and 500 work in Europe.

Altair CEO Jim Scapa was born and raised in New York but moved to Detroit after being scouted by Ford after he graduated from Columbia University with a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering. / Kimberly P. Mitchell/Detroit Free Press

ADVERTISEMENT

Altair also has grown through the acquisition of a number of small companies. In December, Altair announced plans to acquire EM Software & Systems — a company based in Capetown, South Africa - S.A.

This year, Scapa said, Altair’s annual sales should exceed \$300 million, or about 15% more than 2013.

Contact Brent Snavelly: 313-222-6512 or bsnavely@freepress.com. Follow him on Twitter @BrentSnavelly

SPONSORED LINKS

by Taboola



Ridiculously Popular Hoodie is Finally...
BI.com | American Giant Hoodie



How I Finally Understood My 401(k)...
Mint | Future Advisor



"Brightest Flashlight Ever" Is Selling Out F...
G700 Tactical Flashlight

NIGHTLIFE

SUBSCRIBE!

MICHIGAN NEWS



Bacon Bash 2014



Sign up for home delivery today

ADVERTISEMENT

Site Map | Back to Top

NEWS

SPORTS

AUTOS

BUSINESS

USA TODAY

FOLLOW US

LIFE

ENTERTAINMENT

OPINION

Twitter

Facebook

Mobile

RSS

E-mail Alerts

News | Jobs | Cars for Sale | Homes for Sale | Apartments for Rent | Shopping | Classifieds | E-Circulars | Daily Deals

A PART OF
DETROIT
MEDIA SOLUTIONS

MICHIGAN
MEDIA
SOLUTIONS
A GANNETT COMPANY

GANNETT

Copyright © 2015 archive.freep.com. All rights reserved.

Users of this site agree to the [Terms of Service](#), [Privacy Notice/Your California Privacy Rights](#), and [Ad Choices](#)