

MIKE
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TECH VIEW



Isle incubator Blue Startups proves success can be local

In a recent column I related the saga of Honolulu entrepreneur Ho'ala Greevy, who moved to San Francisco to get his startup Paobox traction on the mainland. Not all companies have to leave Hawaii to be successful.

This week we'll look at two companies being hatched by local incubator Blue Startups. One of them, a company called KeyReply, recently relocated to Oahu from Singapore to gain entry into the U.S.

KeyReply, which just launched its new keyboard

app, allows end users to efficiently reply to text or email communications on the go. Co-founder Spencer Yang said that the application is designed for people who need to respond rapidly but are not in a position to do so. Thus if you're a real estate agent in a meeting or taxiing on an airport runway and need to follow up on a hot lead, with just three taps on a mobile device, you can respond instantly to your client.

How did this company from Singapore end up in Hawaii?

Yang said that he'd heard great things about Honolulu's tech ecosystem in Singapore and applied for the Blue Startup program online, the day before the deadline.

In his short time here, Yang says, he's been impressed with the facilities at Blue Startup's 55 Merchant St. office and the quality of the program's mentors. He also appreciates that Blue Startup has provided introductions to actual paying clients.

In addition to the incubator infrastructure, KeyReply's co-founder says that Hawaii's time zone overlaps the mainland and provides a cultural setting that is both comfortable and familiar to his team. He loves the great food; the weather, which is similar to that of Singapore; and the recreational activities.

After the Blue Startup program is over in January, Yang says, his three-person

team most likely will shift to San Francisco to seek more customers. For more details on the company's products, visit KeyReply.com.

Another Blue Startup company with a keen interest in selling its software to the mainland is Nest Egg Guru, which specializes in retirement planning software for professionals and consumers.

JR Robinson, who has worked as a financial planner for 26 years, says he founded Nest Egg Guru because he felt the software available for financial planners simply wasn't up to snuff.

"Most of the programs used by the big investment firms are marketing tools," says Robinson. "They have snazzy-looking charts but do a poor job at testing market scenarios and ascertaining the right retirement withdrawal strategies."

Robinson canceled his \$1,600-per-year financial

planning software subscription and teamed up with Jack DeJong, a University of Hawaii business school professor, to help him program a better app.

The result, he says, is a system that rigorously will stress-test retirement portfolios under the most adverse scenarios. He also believes his program has components that even the most sophisticated retirement calculators lack.

"The financial planning software on the market often doesn't account for investment expenses, nor do they account for the current historic low interest rates on bonds and cash," says Robinson. "These elements can really impact your portfolio growth and retirement withdrawal strategies. They

need to be considered in testing how long your money may last."

He gives credit to the Hawaii Technology Development Corp. for helping launch Nest Egg Guru and for introducing him to Blue Startups, which has assisted him with marketing, social media, search engine optimization and logo design.

The Nest Egg Guru founder says his plan is to use Hawaii as a test bed and eventually scale up sales nationally. "I want to grow the business here, gain traction quickly and create good-paying jobs," says Robinson. "This is the kind of business that can be located in Hawaii and marketed to professionals or consumers around the nation."

Mike Meyer, formerly Internet general manager at Oceanic Time Warner Cable, is now chief information officer at Honolulu Community College. Reach him at mmeyer@hawaii.edu.