## What is the name of your company?

Refer Engine

## Please describe your business in 140 characters or less.

A Facebook integration service to help app developers market their apps by rewarding customers for successful recommendations.

## In more detail, what will your company do or make? What's new, interesting, or different about what your company will do?

Refer Engine is a Facebook integration service for mobile/Windows apps: it promises developers higher app sales by getting customers to recommend the app to their friends on Facebook and rewarding the customers for successful recommendations. The delivery model is business-to-developer: we give the developer a piece of code to put in their app and we take it from there. Here is what this code does:

1. App asks user to recommend the app on Facebook and offers a reward for successful recommendations
2. User logs in to Facebook and posts a recommendation with an optional message (and friend tags) - all within the app itself, through Refer Engine. This will post a "John Smith has recommended an app" on John's timeline which links to detailed page about the app within Facebook. If the user tagged friends, the post will appear on their timeline too.
3. Refer Engine tracks friends downloads of the app and notifies the user that she has earned a reward

The reward an app offers varies per-app and is chosen by the developer. For example, Blu Graphing Calculator offers: "if 3 of your friends buy the app, you get $2 in cash" (which is a refund for the app).

The differentiation for Refer Engine is that it is a marketing product delivered as a developer service. The advantages of this are:

1. Much lower barrier to entry than other marketing products: you can literally be using Refer Engine in your app in 20 minutes.
2. Applications that are developed by smaller teams or individual developers can market their apps without having a marketing person and for much cheaper than other marketing campaigns (Facebook/Google ads, App Marketing Platforms, etc..)
3. No customer contact is needed for us to make a sale, thus Refer Engine can grow virally. This is rare for marketing products.

## If you have a website or demo/prototype, what's the URL? Please provide username and password if necessary.

Refer Engine is currently live within one application in the Windows Store: Blu Graphing Calculator. You can use a Windows 8 PC to download the app and check out Refer Engine recommendation.

The landing page for Refer Engine developer registration is also live: https://www.ReferEngine.com.

You can also check out a sample application page on Facebook: https://apps.facebook.com/referengine/app/21 (this is what Facebook users see after they click on a recommendation posted by a friend)

## Business Video

<https://www.referengine.com/video/product>

## Team Video

<https://www.referengine.com/video/team>

## Please tell us about each founder and their role. Explain how you met and how long you've been working together. Please be thorough because we place a great deal of importance on the team.

I'm a single founder. I'm the one who does the planning/development/testing and hire contractors to do things I can't: design, writing, legal, accounting. I also have friends advising me in design, branding, business and software architecture.

I worked for Microsoft for around 4 years before I quit 3 months ago to start Refer Engine.

I've been into software since I was 14 and am completely self taught. I had my own web business in high-school and college where I built software for clients and for myself. After coming to the US for my master’s degree, I worked for Microsoft (1/2009 - 10/2012) where I started early on Windows 8 app development. I worked on the Windows 8 team for 3 years, won an early internal win8 app-building contest then moved to the Bing team to build their Windows 8 Search application. I also was a reviewer of a Microsoft Press book "Programming Windows® 8 Apps with HTML, CSS, and JavaScript" (http://www.amazon.com/Programming-Windows%C2%AE-Apps-JavaScript-ebook/dp/B009WS8FCG, I'm in the acknowledgements).

My last day at Microsoft was the release date of Windows 8 (October 26 2012).

## Explain how the company will make money

Refer Engine will be a monthly subscription service for developers. It is a freemium model: free full-featured plan up to a number of users then pricing tiers according to number of active users. For developers who choose to use a reward program that Refer Engine implements and runs, they will be charged for the rewards too.

The details of the pricing plans are not yet set. I should have those by end of Feb according to my timeline.

## Please provide information on current or likely competitors. Include key differentiators. Please include URLs.

There are many competitors in the app-marketing space.

- AppGratis (http://www.appgratis.com) offers one free app every day, but it is a random app every day that the user might not even want. Refer Engine could have simultaneous offers on thousands of apps.

- TradeMob (http://www.trademob.com/) and Fiksu (http://www.fiksu.com) and similar companies offer advanced app marketing solutions that are expensive in both time and money. Refer Engine takes 20 minutes to sign-up integrate with your app.

An important point here is that an app can choose to use one of these competitor services and still use Refer Engine at the same time.

## What are some things that the team (or its members) have built in the past? Please include URLs.

I built Blu Graphing Calculator for Windows 8 (http://apps.microsoft.com/windows/en-US/app/blu-graphing-calculator/764cce31-8f93-48a6-b4fc-008eb78e50d4). It is currently one of the best rated and most downloaded Calculator apps on the Windows 8 app store (>19000 downloads in 2 months, > 100 ratings and > 4 stars)

While at Microsoft I was part of building Windows 8 (3 years) and Bing Search App for Windows 8 (1 year).

## Can each of the founders attend the entirety of the program, or do some of you have other obligations during the timeframe of the program? If not, please explain.

Yes

## Not including the founders, how many additional employees are there? Please provide LinkedIn profiles and Github URLs (if applicable).

None

## Please provide information on money the company has already raised, and any information on fundraising plans for the future.

No official rounds so far. My brother is sending me money but no official papers on that yet.

I'm planning a seed round around April or May. I should have enough traction in the Windows 8 Store apps by then to justify expanding in to iOS and Android.

## Why should we choose your company?

I have the experience and personality necessary to make this work. I had a web development business when I was in highschool/college and I have great experience with 4 years at Microsoft. Being a single founder does not mean I'm alone. I have friends who advise me in different matters (code architecture, branding, design, business).

Refer Engine solves a real problem in app discovery and marketing with a new approach. Refer Engine is completely built on Windows Azure (plus client-side code to ping the service), I'd be happy to discuss the architecture I have so far.

## If accepted, are each of the founders open to residing in Washington, Oregon or Northern California after the program? If not where would you headquarter your company?

Yes. I live in Seattle and plan on staying here.

## Are you currently a US based company?

Yes

## If not, are you willing and able to form a US corporation if you are accepted into this program and relocate to the US long-term to build your business?

N/A

## Who are your most likely early customers? Have you talked to them? What has their reaction been?

Windows 8 application developers are my early customers. Some friends are developing for Windows 8 and they are excited for Refer Engine and waiting for the first developer release to try it out.

I also did a test to gauge interest: 3 days of Google ads that lead to my landing page. I got 20 signups in those 3 days, cost per sign-up was $7.5 which works very well since I expect a much higher lifetime value per customer.

I also have a database of the emails of all the developers who have apps in the Windows 8 Store, along with all the store information on those apps. (I wrote code that parses the Windows Store website and grabs information about all the Windows Store apps including contact emails for support, it runs daily). I can use this data to filter by app price, app type, and developer type (person or company). My current thinking that the best early customers would be paid applications that are not games developed by individuals (this filters out to > 1000 in my database).

## Please describe current progress or traction. Include customers, user metrics, revenue, or any other indicators of progress.

Here are the release plans:

1. Build the Refer Engine customer-side service (app authentication, Facebook integration, recommendation system, recommendation reward tracking, etc...)
2. Release Refer Engine within Blu Graphing Calculator with a reward offer (if 3 friends by, you get $2 cash) (Target was mid-January, Actual was January 22, is currently live)
3. Build the Refer Engine developer-side service (developer registration, billing system, application on-boarding and activation)
4. Release in private beta to targeted customers (target is March 1st)

I'm in step 3 now, building the developer-side service.

The early release within Blu Graphing Calculator has been very beneficial to iron out the experience and discover bugs. I'm performing user tests every couple of days and releasing an update. The user feedback from the app-customer side has been positive so far: they love that the app offers them cash for recommendations.

## What do you think your unfair advantage is that will help you beat the competition?

My experience is the advantage I have here. I have been part of Windows 8 since we started the project four years ago at Microsoft. I have a huge head-start on Windows 8 development that enables me to make Refer Engine a seamless experience within Windows 8 apps. I'm also originally a web-developer. Refer Engine needs both those sides to work. I've also had experiences on both extremes of software development. For several years, I worked on my own business where I built software from idea to delivery and for the past 4 years I learned how professionals do it at Microsoft. I've even been part of very different experiences at Microsoft: Windows team which shipped once in 3 years, and Bing team which ships code to production once a week.

Another advantage is being first-to-market in offering marketing as a developer service. First to market is a big advantage here since once an app offers rewards for referrals it is really hard to remove it (since Refer Engine is what tracks the referrals and has the customer info).

## Who is your next hire or addition to the team, and how will you find them?

My next hire will be a developer to work on the iOS/Android integration. I will probably offer a paid summer internship here in Seattle and target University of Washington students.

## What business challenges keep you up at night?

Conversion rates: when a user sees the Refer Engine intro page that asks them to log in to Facebook, how many are actually clicking through to login. This is the single most important metric for Refer Engine. If I figure out how to make this rate increase, acquiring developers should become easier as we have proven results. My current conversion rates are not bad but not amazing, I'm performing different tests on the live service to maximize these numbers.

## What's been the biggest surprise thus far in working on your company?

The biggest surprise or change of plans is the amount of live usability testing I do (through usertesting.com). The feedback and experiences that I see from those are affecting the direction of the design and product in a big way.

## Please list any Microsoft Accelerator or TechStars mentors or past founders that you know personally (if any).

Harley Trung, cofounder & CTO of SocialSci, TechStars Boston 2010

## How did you hear about this program?

Windows Azure blog

## Why are you applying to to the Microsoft Accelerator powered by TechStars and what do you want to achieve by going through the program?

As a single founder the most thing I'm looking for is mentors. I have brilliant friends who are software engineers and Harvard/MIT MBAs. I get great advice from them. What I lack is connections to people who are good in startups and all the challenges that come with that.

I'm also excited about meeting some of the Microsoft Azure experts. Since my whole product is built on Azure, getting the cloud architecture right is very important.

Of course, TechStars would also be a great seal of confidence on the company for future hires and investors.