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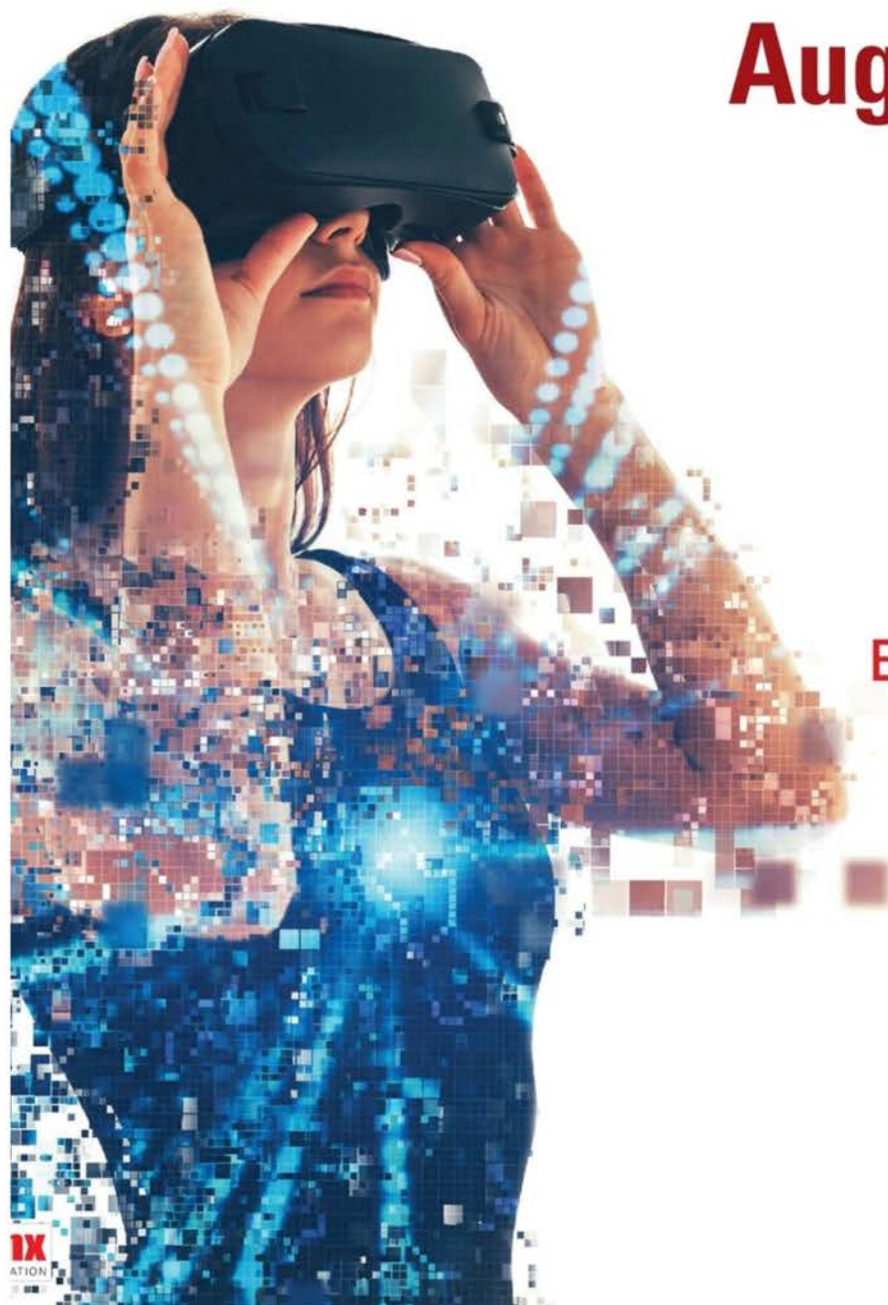
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Charting Their Own Course

Every entrepreneur's journey is as unique as he or she is. The common denominator: a passion to improve the lives of patients.

Risk-takers, disrupters, change agents, visionaries — more than a dozen industry entrepreneurs discuss what it takes to make the bold step to create something new and the twists and turns of their journeys.

By Taren Grom



FABIO GRATTON
Founder

Fabio Gratton is a serial entrepreneur who runs Alchemy Factory, a California-based digital health and tech incubator and co-work space. Alchemy has launched a series of ground-breaking ventures, including Carma Project, a life-saving game designed to accelerate the recall of deadly Takata airbags, CureClick, a novel crowdsourced clinical trial recruitment service, Sonic Health, a story-driven idea consultancy, BryteLife, a rehydration soda water enriched with performance-level electrolytes, and his latest venture, inVibe, a disruptive speech emotion market research platform for health. Previously, Fabio co-founded one of the leading digital agencies in the United States, Ignite Health, that was sold to inVentic Health in 2007.



INVIBE LABS

Founded: 2013

No. of employees: 10

Location: Costa Mesa, Calif. and Philadelphia

inVibe is a personal journey for Fabio. "Someone at my previous company was diagnosed with cancer and I soon found myself struggling to provide him with the emotional support I wanted to give him," he explains. "Direct contact was impossible. A get-well card felt woefully inadequate. And clogging his voicemail was just rude. His friends and colleagues shared in my frustration. So that's when I had the idea for an app that would allow someone to invite friends on Facebook to leave a voice message in a communal mailbox, which would be delivered after a specified number of days."

He and his business partner Jeremy Franz built a rudimentary version, and it worked. "I remember how happy he was to hear all our voices while he was undergoing chemo," Fabio says. "A few years later an industry colleague came to me with a challenge he was facing in conducting qualitative market research at scale with patient influencers — and it just seemed so obvious that an automated voice capture solution similar to what inspired that cancer app would be the ideal solution. So we built what is now inVibe."

Good Vibrations

The company was originally called Vocalize, but Fabio says they couldn't get the dot.com version of the name and the trademark application was denied. "We knew we would probably have to change the name one day, but that day came much sooner than we thought when we received a very cryptic email that started a bizarre round of negotiations that culminated in an offer too good to refuse — more money than we made all year," he says. "During the time we were contemplating selling the name we went through hundreds of possible new names and ultimately landed on inVibe. The 'in' captured the immediacy of our platform — how the technology would enable companies to capture the voice of their customers 'in the moment.' The 'vibe' represented the idea of resonating, or being 'in tune' — which is what companies want their messages to do, and something that our platform helps by analyzing acoustic markers in the voice."

Timing is Everything

Fabio says he didn't set out to become an entrepreneur, which sounds strange for a man who has created multiple companies. "I knew I liked to create things, and I also knew that I had a knack for getting people to align with my ideas," he says. "This ability, combined with the good fortune of being at the right place at the right time ultimately resulted in an invitation to join two industry veterans to start a company back in 2000 — Ignite Health — which would go on to become one of the most successful digital health agencies of its day."

"The biggest driving force that prompted me to start this entrepreneurial journey was my state of mind," he continues. "I felt that I had nothing to lose, and I was excited and grateful for the opportunity. But once we set things in motion, it set something in motion within me that I've never been able to turn off — the sheer thrill and excitement to know that I am capable of creating something that will be loved by more than just my mother."

In the first couple of years, Fabio says inVibe was extremely small, and pretty much all they did was eat, breathe, and drink product. "There was little time for culture, and we really weren't too concerned about that," he says. "As we started to grow, we struggled a bit with culture because we only knew one way to operate — which was heads-down 24/7, so we attracted people who shared that mentality — and that meant things were pretty quiet in the office."

However, as the company continued to grow the need to interact emerged organically, and Fabio says this is starting to yield a beautiful yarn spun out from the passion they all feel about what they do, and it's bringing his team together in a way he never thought possible. "If there's anything I've learned about a culture, it's this: it's incredibly important to have, but extremely difficult to create," he says.

Ears to the Ground

For Fabio, the breakthrough moment for inVibe was when he and his team realized that what they had was a "listening company." "For years we described ourselves as a 'voice company,' partly because voice-tech was hot, but also because that's exactly what we do — we capture voice," he says. "Then one day I found myself reading Snap Inc's S1 as it prepared to go public and when Snap's CEO Evan Spiegel described his vanishing message company as a 'camera company' it just hit me like a ton of bricks. It was so surprising, disorienting, yet it so perfectly described how Snap was completely redefining the camera experience for a new generation. I felt like that's what we were doing — completely changing the way people listen to their customers — so now suddenly calling ourselves a voice company felt as uninspired as Snap calling itself a social network. At that moment I knew that how we described ourselves needed to do much more than highlight our unique technology, it needed to communicate our core mission, which is to ensure that all people are given a chance to be heard."

To achieve that goal, Fabio and his team set out to be the best listeners in the world. "And so it was that inVibe found its soul, and this has made a world of a difference in so many ways — from how we talk about our product, how we interact with our team, and most importantly, how we listen to our customers," he says.