



STARTUPS & INNOVATIONS

By Jasmine Spearing-Bowen

CONTRACT

Irvine-based work communication software maker **TeamKnit** recently signed a \$1.8 million contract to provide its technology to a national insurance company, the details of which are being kept private until implementation is complete in June.

Company co-founder and Chief Executive **Nick Panhwar** said TeamKnit's software combines all of the best features of productivity platforms such as Slack, Jira and Asana into one product that simplifies communication and reduces costs.

It gives users companies the ability to only need one workplace collaboration tool, instead of the current average of five.

The company counts French mega-retailer **Carrefour** among its clients, and is currently in talks with several large American retailers.

TeamKnit graduated last year from **California State University Fullerton's Center for Entrepreneurship** incubator, and the center's director **John Bradley Jackson** still advises the company.

The company was founded in 2016, in Toronto, but moved its headquarters to OC shortly after.

The 20-person team has been bootstrapped so far. Panhwar said he has turned down offers from venture capital firms; he projects the company to surpass \$6 million in revenue this year.



Panhwar: TeamKnit co-founder, CEO

PARTNERSHIP

Costa Mesa-based **Carma Project** has paid out nearly \$100,000 in incentives in collaboration with auto manufacturer **Toyota** to users who encourage friends and family to replace potentially deadly airbags.

Airbags manufactured by Japanese company **Takata Corp.** were recalled last year, affecting vehicles built by 19 different automakers.

Carma Project's website allows users to check the status of any vehicle if it's part of the recall. If it is and the owner gets it replaced, the referrer can receive up to \$55 in gift cards.

Company co-founder and Chief Executive **Fabio Gratton** said his Costa Mesa-based company **ClickCure** was using a similar model to recruit people for clinical trials when they were approached by Toyota about the recall.

Carma Project has some investment from Toyota, but Gratton has also invested his own funds. The company is in talks with other automakers about getting involved as well.

Gratton said the goal for the company is to eventually broaden into other recalls, and then into product safety in general.



Gratton: recalls, product safety aim

Aliso Viejo-based retail technology company **AWM Smart Shelf** recently unveiled its Frictionless Shopping Application with eight retailers enrolled in the pilot program.

AWM Frictionless uses cameras and computer vision to automate the retail experience, including checkout and payment. Cameras track customer behavior as they take things off the shelf, and then charge a digital wallet as they exit the store, bypassing the traditional checkout process.

Marketing Manager **Kaitlyn Kem-**



Pilot program: AWM Smart Shelf technology being tested

Wireless communication firm **Movandi Corp.** recently kicked off sales for its new 5G technology product **BeamXR**, which improves performance, coverage and latency in 5G networks, the next generation of wireless connectivity.

The Newport Beach-based company demoed the technology last month at Mobile World Congress in Barcelona.

Movandi was founded in 2016 by Chief Operating Officer **Maryam Rofougaran** and Chief Technology Officer **Reza Rofougaran**, siblings who also co-founded Bluetooth chipmaker **Innovent Systems** in 1998, which they sold to semiconductor giant **Broadcom** in 2000.

Reza said the customer target for the BeamXR will be wire-



Maryam Rofougaran: 5G products could be sold to consumers in future

less providers such as **Verizon** and **AT&T**, but the technology could be self-installed and might eventually sell at retailers like **Best Buy**.

The company announced a partnership with Dutch connectivity company **NXP Semiconductors N.V.** to collaborate on millimeter wave solutions for 5G networks, combining NXP's digital networking and signal processing with Movandi's RF transceiver and system architecture for use in smart homes, self-driving cars and mobile cloud-based services.

Movandi employs 40 people and has received nearly \$40 million in funding from venture capital firms, including San Francisco-based **Cota Capital**, **Sierra Ventures** and **DNX Ventures**, the latter two based in Silicon Valley.

OFFICE SPACE

Beauty technology device maker **QYK Sonic** last week moved to larger headquarters in Garden Grove.

The skincare company relocated into a nearly 13,000-square-foot space along West Garden Grove Boulevard; it was previously leasing a 3,000-square-foot office in Huntington Beach.

Founded in 2017 by clinical pharmacist and Chief Operating Officer **Dr. Jacqueline Nguyen** and her husband Chief Executive **Rakesh Tammabattula**, the company has been privately



Tammabattula and Nguyen: growing line of skincare products

funded by the couple and currently has 35 employees.

QYK Sonic's ZOE facial cleansing device is sold on the company's website, **Amazon.com** and by 75 dermatology clinics and medical spas nationwide.

It retails between \$149 and \$249.

The new location will house Nguyen's other companies, which include **Dr. J's Natural**, a dietary and herbal supplement line, and **Ensohara**, a line of CBD oils and products.

STAFFING

Marketing startup **Directive Consulting** named **Jesse Seilhan** as the managing director for its Irvine headquarters.

Directive is a B2B digital marketing agency. It helps enterprise companies and others to generate leads, and has clients all over the world, including Northfield Township, Ill.-based **Allstate Insurance Co.**, Horsham, Pa.-based software manufacturer **Aegis Software** and San Jose-based tech giant **Cisco Systems**.

Seilhan was previously serving as the company's director of client services.



Seilhan: client base has doubled in two years

"I've been with Directive for a little under two years and I've seen us almost triple in employee size more than double in client size," he said.

Directive was founded in 2014, and has been bootstrapped with no outside funding.

The company currently has 60 employees, and offices in New York City, Los Angeles, and London. It recently opened another location in Austin, Texas.

Seilhan said the company is continuing to grow its OC office and plans to hire several more people this year.



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EVENTS

CAREER BOOSTS

March 18-27, 2019

Compiled by Brian Alvarado

MONDAY, MARCH 18

■ **How to Raise Money from Investors & Are You Ready?** (Founder Institute), Irvine, 6 p.m., free, goo.gl/LD2Gx9

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 20

■ **Noel Durity, Founder of Twist It Up Comb** (Startup Grind OC), Irvine, 6 p.m., \$15-\$30, goo.gl/cyb1XP

THURSDAY, MARCH 21

■ **Investor Speed Dating** (Tech Coast Venture Network), Irvine, 5:30 p.m., cost varies, goo.gl/8EyQxt

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 27

■ **Orange County VC and Angel Investor Conference** (FundingPost), Irvine, 5 p.m., \$65, (860) 261-2322, goo.gl/ND7QeY

■ **Microgrant Opportunities for Science-based Startups** (CSUF Startup), Irvine, 6 p.m., free, (657) 278-3464, goo.gl/td4ayi

RECURRING

■ **1 Million Cups** (UCI Applied Innovation), Irvine, every Wednesday, 7:45 a.m., free, (949) 824-2683, innovation.uci.edu