



'This is about building the consumer health platform that starts with consumers, but then has the opportunity to completely reshape the face of health care as we know it.' — JASON JACOBS | Founder of FitnessKeeper

Startups have potential to revolutionize their fields

By Don Seiffert | Special to the Journal

Explosive growth, millions of dollars in venture capital funding and the potential to revolutionize the fields they're in are all qualities that Boston-area startups Gemvara, Rapid7 and FitnessKeeper have in common.

Before he founded his online custom-order jewelry website in 2006 while still a Babson student, Matt Lauzon, 27, didn't have any background in either jewelry or programming.

"I really didn't have much experience except lifeguarding and mowing lawns," he said.

Six years later, he ended up with Gemvara.com, a website that enables buyers to order their own pieces of jewelry, choosing among seven metals and more than a dozen gemstones. The cost is between \$50 and \$75,000, and pieces are crafted by local artisans and shipped within five to 15 days.

Most of the company's 75 employees are in Boston, while the rest are in

New York City. While Lauzon didn't report revenue, he said the company tripled the number of orders year over year for the last two years. He's also raised \$25 million in financing from Highland Capital Partners, Canaan Partners and Balderton Capital.

One advantage of his business model is eliminating the need for inventory, said Lauzon.



Jason Jacobs

"I think there's been a long-standing notion that people need to be able to touch and feel it," he said of the jewelry business. "We need to find a way to decrease dependence on inventory."

Integrated security risk startup Rapid7 was founded in 2000. For the first four years, the Boston company was bootstrapped, said CEO Mike Tuchen, but in 2004 it took off. The sheer pace of that growth is one of the impressive aspects of the company.

"Since 2004, all the way up until last year, we've had a compounded annual growth rate of just over 90 percent," he said.

The company first developed its award-winning vulnerability management product, Nexpose; then, in 2009, it acquired the penetration testing

platform Metasploit. The combination has proved a winner, enabling the company to raise \$59 million in funding from Bain Capital Ventures and Technology Crossover Ventures.

Tuchen did not disclose revenue, but said the company now has nearly 250 employees, compared with 50 when Tuchen started in 2008. The focus in the next couple of years will be in three areas: acquisitions, investment in the existing product, and expansion in Asia and Europe.

In terms of sheer potential to change the way we live, Boston-based FitnessKeeper is poised to have the biggest impact. Founder Jason Jacobs says the company's mobile health data tracking system, called RunKeeper, is working in a field that will eventually change the roles of doctors and hospitals — in fact all of health care itself.

The company raised \$10 million in venture capital in November led by Spark Capital, and in January it moved



from the South End to a 7,200-square-foot office at 60 Canal St., near the TD Garden, to accommodate plans to grow from 16 employees to 42 this year.

The program, which tracks data from daily jogging, has enabled developers of at least 40 other health and fitness apps to connect to it. Jacobs envisions collecting data on fitness, eating, sleeping, then building features that allow consumers to make sense of the data.

"This is about building the consumer health platform that starts with consumers, but then has the opportunity to completely reshape the face of health care as we know it," Jacobs recently told the Journal.

Matt Lauzon founded his online custom-ordered jewelry business – Gemvara.com – while still a student at Babson College. The 27-year-old's company has 75 employees and \$25 million in financing.

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