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RockMass Technologies digs deeper for global growth in mining industry

SHELBY YEE AND MATTHEW GUBASTA MET THE TEAM AT LAUNCH LAB IN 2016 WHEN THEY WERE TRYING TO COMMERCIALIZE TECHNOLOGY FROM QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY. FOUR YEARS LATER THEY'VE REVOLUTIONIZED UNDERGROUND MINING, MAKING IT SAFER AND MORE EFFICIENT.

"The RockMass journey started in Kingston at the Queen's Innovation Centre Summer Initiative in 2016," said Gubasta. "The 14-week intensive summer program allowed us to explore entrepreneurship while reducing the initial risk through a paid stipend. In the first week of the program, I met my co-founder Shelby Yee and it wasn't long before we identified this unique opportunity to work with the university to commercialize some research."

With Launch Lab's guidance, RockMass Technologies navigated a commercialization agreement with Queen's University, a first for a student-run company. "By August of 2016, we were working out of Kingston and bootstrapping along with some seed money won in a pitch contest leveraged with support from the Ontario Centres of Excellence and The National Research Council of Canada Industrial Research Assistance Program," said Gubasta.

ROCKMASS TECHNOLOGIES
GROUNDED IN INNOVATION

FAST FACTS

Why Launch Lab

With Launch Lab's guidance, RockMass Technologies navigated a commercialization agreement in the summer of 2016 with Queen's University, a first for a student-run company. By August, the RockMass team was working out of Kingston and bootstrapping.

Client testimonial

"OUR ENTREPRENEURIAL JOURNEY STARTED IN KINGSTON AT THE QUEEN'S INNOVATION CENTRE SUMMER INITIATIVE IN 2016. THERE, WE MET THE TEAM AT LAUNCH LAB. IT HASN'T JUST BEEN ABOUT SPEEDING THINGS UP OR GETTING MORE MONEY INTO THE COMPANY. IT'S MORE ABOUT IDENTIFYING THE NEXT MILESTONE AND SUCCEEDING WITH LAUNCH LAB'S EXCELLENT ADVICE."

— MATTHEW GUBUSTA, CO-FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, ROCKMASS TECHNOLOGIES

Future growth

RockMass Technologies has seen early success with customers getting true value from the Axis Mapper. The company's team has grown to support customers across North and South America, with sales expansion planned in Asian and South African mining districts.

Scott Runte was the Entrepreneur-In-Residence, or EIR assigned to Yee and Gubasta. He is also the CEO of Kingston-based Launch Lab. Throughout 2017 and 2018 he coached Gubasta and Yee on managing shareholder agreements, team development, and pitching for early-stage capital. “I describe the RockMass team as intelligent, driven and coachable,” said Runte. “Even while they were still starting up, Shelby and Matthew were evolving as leaders. They demonstrated a strong commitment to engaging the market and building their business model.”

That business model is focused on securing revenue from the global mining industry from a product called the Axis Mapper. The Axis Mapper is a new method for obtaining real-time structural orientation data through a hand-held platform in GPS-denied environments, such as underground mines and tunnels. The novel approach uses robotics principals and looks like a ruggedized camera. It contains a suite of cutting edge instrumentation coupled with Ph.D. research-based proprietary software. It offers more accurate data in a fraction of the time which makes mining safer.

Runte praises Gubasta and Yee’s ability to tap into province-wide resources that could accelerate their company. For example, they reached out to Sudbury-based NORCAT, which bills itself as a “global ‘one-stop shop’ for all that is the future of mining technology and innovation”. With access to NORCAT’s Underground Centre, RockMass Technologies could test and prototype the Axis Mapper in a working mine.

“NORCAT was a critical part of our successful commercialization. We got underground training at NORCAT and leverage NORCAT to this day to do field tests of the Axis Mapper,” said Gubasta. “It’s very difficult to get time to perform extensive testing underground otherwise.”

Then in August of 2017, Gubasta and Yee were accepted into the HAX Accelerator Program backed by venture capital firm SOSV. “Based in Shezhen China, it is the number one VC-based hardware accelerator in the world,” explained Gubasta. “SOSV does a preliminary investment, then you move to China to develop your hardware concept. So we moved there from August 2017 to January of 2018 and came back with a fully realized device.”

In May of 2018 Gubasta and Yee decided to move RockMass Technologies to Toronto to be close to mining head offices located in the city where 56% of the world’s public mining companies list their stock.

In June of 2018 RockMass Technologies submitted a proposal to Brazil-based NEXA Resources, one of largest Zinc producers in the world, and landed its first multinational mining customer. Now, RockMass is entering new South American markets and expanding its presence in Canada.

The company’s team has grown to 10 people to support customers across North and South America, with sales expansion planned in Asian and South African mining districts. The RockMass team is constantly working to improve the Axis Mapper platform for its’ customers. The founders are looking to the future where they hope to apply their knowledge of the industry to solving new problems.

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