Startups FaceUp.com combats bullying. Its application is used by students and teachers around the world

Three Brno high-school students created a website and mobile app that make it possible to detect bullying and, at the same time, to help address this problem. With CzechInvest, the students have presented their product in Singapore and Dubai, where they gained contacts for expansion to Southeast Asia, North Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

Every fourth student in the world has experience with bullying. In the United States alone, 160,000 students refuse to go to school because they fear for their safety. The startup FaceUp.com decided to intervene and launched the project Nenech to být (Don’t Let It Be), by means of which it is combatting bullying, ostracization and other social problems in Czech schools. The main pillar of the project comprises an application that, in addition to victims of bullying, also focuses on the silent majority, i.e. individuals who are aware of the problem, but for certain reasons are afraid to talk about it. Thanks to this platform, they can do it anonymously and outside of the school environment. Under the name FaceUp.com, the young entrepreneurs also offer their application in other countries, such as South Africa, Poland and the United States.

The start-up’s product is used by more than three thousand teachers in more than 1,800 countries around the world. The FaceUp.com application has received over 5,800 notifications in the three years that it has been on the market.
“Both students and teachers or parents can write in the application. They can report suspicious or unpleasant behaviour to someone around them. In addition to that, the application has an online chat function, so students can connect with a particular teacher in real time,” says Jan Sláma, one of the founders of the startup FaceUp.com, adding: “We offer basic and enhanced versions. The enhanced version contains professional telephone support, class diagnostics, which helps schools to gain a basic overview of the situation and relationships between schoolmates, and other functions, thanks to which schools will not have to deal with bullying on their own.”

The founders of FaceUp.com, Jan Sláma, David Špunar and Pavel Ihm, are now only twenty years old, but they do not lack business sense. “We had our initial ideas in elementary school. We came up with applications and established a student development studio. We always found support in our surroundings. It’s possible to do business at any age; you just can’t be afraid to do it,” says Sláma. The young entrepreneurs, who are united not only by their passion for modern technologies, but also by negative experiences from childhood, were only 16 years old when they launched the project. In elementary school, they witnessed bullying themselves and decided to fight it. In order to be able to do business, Sláma and Špunar sought and received emancipation. With an investment from Jiří Hlavenka, they successfully established the startup FaceUp.com a year later.
Due to the fact that not only Czech children have a problem with bullying, the application has had global ambitions almost since the very beginning. The number of users in Africa and the Americas grew in 2019, i.e. two years after the startup was founded. In order to support this growth, the entrepreneurs needed to be close to potential partners and clients and to introduce their product to them. In addition to that, completely new markets were found for expansion. Therefore, the company used CzechInvest’s CzechDemo programme.

In June of the same year, they travelled to Asia and attended the Innovfest Unbound Singapore 2019 conference. “The conference exceeded our expectations. We met with a number of important people and gained many useful contacts and a lot of experience that will help us not only with expanding to the Asian market,” says co-founder David Špunar, adding: “Thanks to CzechInvest’s foreign partner, the Expara accelerator in Singapore, we were thoroughly prepared for meetings with potential customers. We familiarised ourselves in advance with the local ecosystem, we learned to create brief pitches and to give presentations. We then put that to use in front of more than ten foreign investors from all over Southeast Asia.”

After the successful stay in Singapore, the startup decided to discover other markets and exhibited at the GESS conference in Dubai in February 2020, again with support from the CzechDemo programme. In Dubai, the company succeeded in gaining a large number of contacts, primarily in the field of education.

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\textit{Jan Sláma, one of the founders of FaceUp.com}

FaceUp.com gained not only necessary contacts for expansion abroad, but also feedback on its product, which, among other things, brought the company new demand and the opportunity to expand its application. Employees and employers pointed out that an anonymous communication channel through which they could report anything that bothered them in the workplace would also suit them. The founders of the startup did not hesitate and began working on a new version of the application, this time focused on companies. Its purpose is to help employees and employers maintain a safe and friendly climate in the workplace, as well as the corporate culture and high-quality relationships. Users of the application can draw attention not only to their colleagues’ psychological problems, including depression, anxiety and impending burnout, but also to instances of non-compliance with company regulations and directives, discrimination and physical aggression.

Thanks to a high level of media coverage, the startup has already gained two strategic investors, namely the Czech entrepreneur Jiří Hlavenka and the company Scio. In the three years in which the startup has been in operation, it has opened sales offices in seven locations, and its application is now used at the school previously attended by Elon Musk, visionary and head of Tesla, at which he himself encountered bullying. In December last year, FaceUp.com accepted a challenge from CzechInvest and, together with nine other selected startups, presented its product in the CzechInvest Startup Challenge 2019. In September 2020, the startup won the national round of the Creative Business Cup competition and will represent the Czech Republic at the global final in Copenhagen.
The founders of FaceUp.com, Jan Sláma, David Špunar and Pavel Ihm, started doing business while still at school. The startup’s application is anonymous, safe and easy to use. It also offers an online chat function and connects students with teachers in real time. Pavel Ihm, Jan Sláma and David Špunar have proven that they truly know how to do business. They have opened sales offices in seven locations and gained two strategic investors.