

Software Siblings Help App Developers Max Out

Hitsfu Uses AI for Product Features, Ad Campaigns

A Mission Viejo-based company that helps app developers understand user behavior recently launched. **Hitsfu Corp.** is a data science company. Its technology, dubbed “Clairvoyance,” uses artificial intelligence to make recommendations for product features and marketing campaigns to create more profit for an app. The patent-pending technology was designed to replace a



STARTUPS

Deirdre Newman

data science team. It focuses on predicting—in real time—all components of business models for apps and summarizing them into a simple interface of “if you do this, your return-on-investment becomes that.” “It’s like a crystal ball that helps developers make decisions,” **Ellie Vilendrer** said. “Many companies have sprung up to help app developers understand user behavior, but all, except for Hitsfu, require experts to mine through, and then pattern the data, to glean insights.”

The company makes money by charging a monthly subscription based on the number of users a customer has.

The founders are siblings **Iman Khabazian**, who serves as chief executive and Vilendrer, who serves as chief operating officer. When Khabazian made games for Disney—he was technical director at **Disney Social** in Palo Alto from 2010 to 2013—he said he found that the studios with successful apps relied on a team of analysts to manually build models to



Track record: Grok founders launched and sold companies before

estimate the “lifetime value” of the apps. The value was the measure by which decisions around app features and advertisements were made. Later, while working with smaller app developers, he said he found that they “completely lacked the expertise to calculate (that value) and make impactful, data-driven decisions.”

That was the inspiration for Hitsfu.

It has earned \$10,000 in revenue, Vilendrer said. It received a “small” investment from **Shak Hossain**, a former “tech evangelist” for San Jose-based **Appcelerator**, she said. Hitsfu is about to start raising a \$1 million seed round, she added. Appcelerator is a privately held mobile technology company.

Proactive About IT

A San Clemente-based company that built software to proactively detect and resolve IT incidents partnered with a software firm that helps other companies transform into digital enterprises. **Grok LLC** partnered with Houston-based **BMC Software Inc.**

Grok created software using artificial intelligence and automation for businesses running applications via the cloud. The software, backed by more than 10 years of machine learning research and development, senses and

responds to potential threats across cloud-based systems, said **Tarun Gangwani**, co-founder and head of product.

Financial details of the partnership cannot be disclosed, he added.

Grok charges a subscription for use of its platform. The software was designed to provide a faster response to IT incidents, Gangwani said. It does that by learning the patterns of behavior within an IT infrastructure, so it can trigger an appropriate response when an incident is detected.

The San Clemente office also houses **Tribal Genius LLC**, a second venture that provides consulting services to companies looking to go digital, Gangwani said. The two organizations are under parent company **AVIK Partners**, which is led by veteran entrepreneurs and brothers **Josh Kindiger**, who serves as president, and **Casey Kindiger**, who serves as chief executive. The brothers are equal partners in AVIK, which is the lead investor of Grok and Tribal Genius, Casey said.

Casey previously built and sold IT companies. He was the founder and former chief executive of Newport Beach-based **Gen-E**, which predicts, analyzes and resolves network problems. He also founded Irvine-based **Resolve Systems**, which created automation software for operations, including IT and security. Josh Kindiger was most recently executive vice president at Resolve.

The brothers have invested more than \$1 million in AVIK and about \$250,000 in Grok, Casey Kindiger said. They intend to ... (do a

Series A raise of approximately \$4 million in 2018, Casey said.)

Grok began testing its product in January 2016 and launched to the public later that year.

Custom IT

An Irvine-based company that provides custom IT services for small and medium businesses has a new client: the Roman Catholic Diocese of Orange. A key member of the diocese’s IT team suffered an injury, and **Greenlight Information Services LLC** was able to “immediately” send someone to help the team continue with projects and support, Chief Executive **Jason Makevich** said.

Since then, the company has provided the diocese with ongoing support and security services through the Greenlight GO program, a turn-key solution—a type of system that can be easily implemented into business processes—for business technology.

Makevich founded Greenlight in 2010 but only brought on his first full-time employee about 15 months ago, “so we’re in the startup-like growth phase now,” he said.

Greenlight makes money by recurring revenue from its clients through its monthly service. It also provides consulting work that’s billed hourly.

No funding has been sought or received, Makevich said.

Greenlight is now able to sustain its growth through profits, he said. 2016 revenue was \$1.7 million, with \$2.9 million projected for this year, Makevich said. He declined to disclose profits.



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Maryam and Reza: Movandi pair 'complement each other's styles'

Sibling Startups a Thing In OC's Ecosystem

Unique Synergies Provide 'Competitive Advantage'

By DEIRDRE NEWMAN

Siblings tend to know each other's nuances and have each other's back. So it's no surprise that three recent Orange County startups—risky undertakings with a lot of sleepless nights—have been created by siblings: Newport Beach-based **Movandi**, Mission Viejo-based **Hitsfu** and San Clemente-based **Grok**. All founders say their siblings complement them.

Take Hitsfu. The startup helps app developers understand user behavior. Co-founder **Iman Khabazian**'s expertise is machine learning and computer programming. He creates the company's vision. His sister **Ellie Vilendrer** is a corporate lawyer at her full-service corporate law firm **Vilendrer Law PC** in Beverly Hills. She keeps her eyes peeled for roadblocks, strategizes on implementing the vision, and tries to reduce risk.

All sibling pairs said OC is a strong place for a new company, including the number of engineers who live in Southern California, and the lifestyle.

"We think the mix of great engineering schools and amazing lifestyle opportunities, mountains (and) oceans ... makes the OC a fantastic place to anchor a company culture," said Grok Chief Executive **Casey Kindiger**. "Our goal is to attract the most committed and talented professionals in the world. Where else can you ski and surf on the same weekend without stepping on an airplane?"

Movandi

Reza and Maryam Rofougaran majored in electrical engineering at the **University of California-Los Angeles**. The sale of their company, **Innovent Systems Inc.**, to **Broadcom** in 2000 for \$440 million and their subsequent engineering work there helped create a wireless communications-chip powerhouse. Broadcom co-founder **Henry Samueli** was one of their UCLA professors.

When Broadcom acquired Innovent, it helped make the former a wireless company, Maryam said. Innovent operated like a startup inside Broadcom, she added. As the former Innovent team grew to several hundred people, it maintained its "innovative culture," helping Broadcom's annual sales grow to over \$3.5 billion in 2013.

After 16 years at Broadcom, the siblings said they felt they'd accomplished their goals to shrink wireless technologies like Bluetooth and Wi-Fi onto wireless chips. They were ready to move on, especially after Broadcom was acquired by **Avago Technologies Ltd.** last year.

Last fall the siblings started Movandi in "stealth mode"—under the radar—and just recently launched. They said they believe there's a big opportunity to apply their wireless expertise in what's known as "high frequency, millimeter wave wireless." Millimeter wave networking is a new technology, and there's "room for innovation to optimize performance, reduce power, minimize size, and lower cost for professional and consumer applications," Reza said.

This decade's breakthrough technologies, such as the Internet of Things, virtual and augmented reality, and the global adoption of smartphones, have created the need for faster and more reliable wireless networks.

"In 2020, it is expected that the number of people who own mobile phones will exceed the amount of people that have access to running water or even electricity," Reza said. "We knew the wireless industry had to adopt much higher frequencies where more spectrum and bandwidth are available."

The emerging 5G standard is using millimeter waves of 20GHz and above. The standard is considered the next wireless "revolution" of multigigabit connectivity.

Reza, the chief technology officer, focuses on researching and developing prod-

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Iman and Ellie: Hitsfu partners don't have to battle 'office politics'

Siblings

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ucts for the new technologies. Maryam specializes in product engineering, operations and business development.

"We know how to best work together and complement each other's styles to build a talented team, execute quickly and build innovative technology solutions," Maryam said.

The duo has 800 patents and has filed for 200 more in the past 20 years covering Bluetooth, Wi-Fi and GPS. Reza said he's one of the top 20 patent holders in the world.

Movandi already has a significant amount of venture capital funding: \$9 million from the likes of **Cota Capital** in San Francisco and **Sierra Ventures** in San Mateo, and a strategic partnership with Taiwanese electronics maker **Wistron NeWeb Corp.**

Hitsfu

Ellie and Iman ran track together in high school and were teammates on the chess and computer programming teams at the **University of Southern California**.

One of the best things about working together is feeling comfortable pointing out shortcomings in each other's ideas, Ellie said.

"I can be completely candid with him and vice versa," she said. "As an attorney who has litigated many disputes between business owners, I know that our relationship serves as a strong competitive advantage. We don't have to battle with office politics, and because we are transparent with one another, we ensure the strongest ideas are implemented."

They chose to base the company here, even though Iman had worked in Silicon Valley, because they say OC tech companies are among the fastest growing in North America. **Deloitte Development LLC's** 2016 Technology Fast 500 awards validates

that assessment—two OC growth-stage companies ranked in the Top 40, both in Irvine: Digital marketing agency **SearchMarketers.com**, No. 4, and security-software developer **CrowdStrike** at No. 40.

"As OC natives, there is no place we would rather be," Ellie said. "We do plan on tapping into the talent pool of Silicon Valley. Having lived there for seven years, Iman has a long Rolodex of talented people whom we plan to recruit to Hitsfu and relocate to SoCal when the time is right."

Ellie said she leverages the contract lawyers and paralegals at her law firm so she can devote "substantial" time to the startup.



Kindiger: he and brother Josh are "good at covering for each other."

Grok

Casey and **Josh Kindiger** say their core skills overlap.

"Josh tends to be more sales and HR-focused, and I tend to be more operations and strategy-focused," Casey said. "We're good at covering for each other and stepping up as the business unfolds."

Casey co-founded a company in 2001 in Chicago called **gen-E Technologies**, which predicts, analyzes and resolves network problems. Josh joined the company a few months later, and gen-E relocated to San Clemente. Casey ran the day-to-day operations, while Josh was in charge of sales, growing the company to more than \$22 million in revenue and over 120 employees. They sold the business to a private equity firm in a confidential transaction, Casey said. Gen-E is now in Newport Beach.

In 2008, Casey and Josh launched **Resolve Systems**, which created automation software for IT and security operations. They started in San Clemente and also moved it to Irvine. Casey was chief executive for the first five years. Josh built the sales organization from the ground up. This year they sold **Resolve to Insight Venture Partners** for an undisclosed amount, Casey said.

So much for sibling rivalry. ■

CALENDAR

Oct. 16-Oct. 25, 2017

Compiled by Rebecca Mondon



Escher String Quartet with guitarist Jason Vieaux: presented by the Soka Performing Arts Center in Aliso Viejo Oct. 22

TV & RADIO PROGRAMS

■ **Inside OC with Rick Reiff** (KDOC-TV), Sunday 5:30 a.m.; (KOCE-TV/PBS SoCal), Tuesday 1 a.m., repeats Friday 2:30 a.m., 9:30 a.m., 5 p.m., Saturday 4:30 p.m., Sunday 11 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday 12:30 a.m., Guests (Oct. 22): Norberto Santana Jr., Voice of OC; Will Swaim, California Policy Center

■ **Critical Mass Radio Show hosted by Richard Franzi** (OC Talk Radio), Tuesday 4 p.m., Guests (Oct. 24): Jodi Duva, VP of Cox Business California; Doug Packard, author of "Lead Your Journey"

CAREER BOOSTS

MONDAY, OCT. 16

■ **Develop a Winning Business Plan** (SCORE Chapter 114), Irvine, 10:30 a.m., Free, (714) 550-7369, orangecounty.score.org

■ **Face to Face With Investors** (Tech Coast Angels and The Portal), Irvine, 5 p.m., \$30, goo.gl/qb1XWQ

TUESDAY, OCT. 17

■ **How to Start a Business With Professor Longshaw** (CSUF Entrepreneurship), Placentia, 3 p.m., Free, (657) 278-3930, goo.gl/LXp87j

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 18

■ **Engaging Employees in the Digital Age** (International Association of Business Communicators), Irvine, 11:30 a.m., Cost varies, (714) 642-7064, www.iabcc.com/events

■ **Why Your Website Should be Your Top Priority** (Orange County SBDC), Santa Ana, 6 p.m., Free, (714) 564-5200, www.ocsbdc.org

■ **Top Tips for a Customer Generating Website** (SCORE Chapter 114), Costa Mesa, 6 p.m., Free, (714) 550-7369, orangecounty.score.org

TUESDAY, OCT. 24

■ **The Art and Science of Creating a Successful Business Plan** (Orange County SBDC), Mission Viejo, 6 p.m., \$25, (714) 564-5200, www.ocsbdc.org

■ **Daybreak Dialogues** (Changemakers), Irvine, 7:30 a.m., Free for members, \$10 for nonmembers, goo.gl/EEZJ3U

WEDNESDAY, OCT. 25

■ **Refining Bank Lending Culture, Credit Standards vs. Business Development** (RMA Orange County), Newport Beach, 4:30 p.m., \$60, (714) 267-5281, www.rmaoc.org

■ **The Secrets to Successfully Leasing Space** (Orange County SBDC), Santa Ana, 6 p.m., Free, (714) 564-5200, www.ocsbdc.org

RECURRING

■ **Newport Center Toastmasters** (Toastmasters International), Newport Beach, every Monday, 7 a.m., Free, (949) 391-3671, www.newportcencerttoastmasters.org

■ **RIAOC Speakers** (Realty Investment Association of California), Anaheim, every Tuesday, 8:30 a.m., \$10, (714) 639-3212, www.riaoc.com

■ **Lunch Mob** (Placentia Chamber of Commerce), TBA, every first Wednesday, 11:30 a.m., Free, (714) 528-1873, www.placentiachamber.com

■ **LeTip Weekly Breakfast Meeting** (LeTip of Mission Viejo), Mission Viejo, every Thursday, 7 a.m., Free, (949) 285-9305, www.meetup.com/letip-of-mission-viejo

EVENTS

■ **Chicago Symphony Orchestra** (The Philharmonic Society of Orange County), Costa Mesa, Oct. 16, 8 p.m., Cost varies, (714) 556-2787, www.philharmonicsociety.org

■ **#TechtoberfestOC 2017** (Eureka Building), Irvine, Oct. 19, 6 p.m., Free, (949) 220-6500, www.eurekabuilding.com

■ **Voices: Veterans Storytelling Project** (Arts Orange County), Costa Mesa, Oct. 20, 6:30 a.m., Free, (714) 556-5160, goo.gl/nfg9kU

■ **John Welsh Band** (Soka Performing Arts Center), Aliso Viejo, Oct. 20, 8 p.m., \$16-\$20, (949) 480-4278, www.performingarts.soka.edu

■ **42nd Annual The Christmas Company** (Junior League of Orange County, California), Costa Mesa, Oct. 21-22, Time varies, Cost varies, (949) 262-0823, www.jlccc.org

■ **Pumpkin With Succulents Make & Take** (Armstrong Garden Center), Costa Mesa, Oct. 21, 9 a.m., \$49, (949) 646-3925, www.armstronggarden.com

■ **Halloween Goes Hollywood** (Pacific Symphony), Costa Mesa, Oct. 21, Time varies, Cost varies, (714) 755-5799, www.pacificsymphony.com

■ **7th Annual Catalina: The Wild Side Art Show** (The Catalina Island Conservancy), Corona del Mar, Oct. 22, Time varies, Cost varies, (562) 437-8555 ext. 1239, www.catalinaconser.org

■ **Escher String Quartet With Guitarist Jason Vieaux** (Soka Performing Arts Center), Aliso Viejo, Oct. 22, 3 p.m., \$32-\$40, (949) 480-4278, www.performingarts.soka.edu

■ **Monday Night Football** (Octane), Irvine, Oct. 23, 5:30 p.m., Free, (949) 824-2683, www.innovation.uci.edu/event

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