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UCT student builds app to make buying and selling textbooks cheaper and easier

For many students new textbooks are excessively expensive, while second-hand books can be hard to find. University of Cape Town (UCT) student Tamir Shklaz is making the process easier and more convenient with his digital platform Quillo, which connects buyers and sellers of second-hand university textbooks.

When Shklaz got to university he was shocked at the number of textbooks he needed and the associated costs. After heading to the noticeboard hoping to get one second-hand he came up short as the textbook had been sold. This is when the Quillo app was born.

After roping in three of his classmates the founding members of Quillo spent the month teaching themselves different programming languages and frameworks.

The app went live on the first day of the academic year at UCT in 2018 and in the span of two weeks there were 2 000 downloads and 500 textbook transactions. When the app was released it was just a noticeboard where buyers and sellers would get in touch on WhatsApp and email. The team are now looking to handle the payment and delivery of the textbooks in-house.

In March Shklaz's three co-founders pulled out of the project, and Tristan Brandt joined Quillo as the tech lead.

At the same time, Shklaz applied to present at UCT's Graduate School of Business (GSB) e-Commerce Pitch Night - where South Africa's top e-commerce start-ups pitch their ideas to a group of investors and judges - and ended up winning the event.

The Quillo team approached the GSB MTN Solution Space about office space for a hackathon where they could spend a weekend just building the app. After being asked to apply they were accepted into the Ventures in Residence programme.

"This means that we have an office space where we're surrounded by other start-ups. We were enthralled, and we were there every day, interacting with other start-ups," said

Shklaz. In April this year the Quillo team joined the GSB's full-time Venture Incubation Programme.

The culmination of the incubation programme was demo night on 26 June where Quillo came away with one of the three prizes: the company that achieved the most in the programme.

Quillo has had the advantage of being well supported all the way. They are also partnering with the South African Education and Environment Project, a non-profit organisation that deals with student development from early childhood development to tertiary level.

Shklaz said that "a lot of these organisations can't verify that the money they are giving their students is going towards textbooks, and that it is happening safely, so they are very keen to use our platform. In general, I would love to be able to start creating an environment where people are donating textbooks, and we are able to supply textbooks to students who can't afford them."

"We want to become more than a textbook marketplace. We think textbooks are a huge problem, but there are a plethora of other problems that students deal with, whether that be grappling with content, social issues, or finding out about a course they want to take."

The long-term aim of Quillo is to make information for students more accessible and become a holistic platform that provides value and support for university students in South Africa, and globally.

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