

Honoring the Champions of Do-Good-ism

Business icons, including Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, turned out this week to celebrate the Social Venture Network's inaugural Hall of Fame.



The true believers were out in force Tuesday night. Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield toted backpacks full of rubber stamps for marking currency with anti-Citizens United messages: part of their crusade to get money out of politics. Jeffrey Hollender talked about his post-Seventh Generation plans to direct billions of corporate procurement dollars to cooperatives of locally owned businesses--and also to launch an organic, fair-trade condom brand. Almost everyone remarked on the irony of corralling so many triple-bottom-liners in a failed bank.

The event, held in Midtown Manhattan's majestic Gotham Hall (formerly Greenwich Savings), was a celebration of the Social Venture Network's inaugural [Hall of Fame](#). If you're not familiar with the SVN, you should be. Almost 10 years before Hillary Clinton advised us that it takes a village, SVN had created a village of villages: home to entrepreneurs and investors leveraging the power of community to make the world a better place. Investor Josh Mailman and Calvert Fund founder Wayne Silby convened the first conference of more than 70 people at a Colorado ranch in 1987. Since then, SVN has served as base camp for socially responsible icons like the Body Shop's Anita Roddick; Stonyfield Farms's Gary Hirshberg; Joe de Vivre's Chip Conley; Birkenstock's Margo Fraser; and Ashoka's Bill Drayton.

This week, SVN inducted those founders and roughly two dozen others into a hall of fame that honors their contributions to preserving the environment, creating caring and democratic workplaces, empowering struggling populations, fighting for social and economic justice and just generally trying to leave the world in better shape than they found it. And they managed all that without sacrificing growth. All the entrepreneurs honored had built organizations of at least \$50 million in revenue and/or the equivalent in social or environmental impact.

The mood was buoyant one week after a national election that--from the perspective of most attendees--could not have gone much better. Master of ceremonies Morgan Spurlock (best known for his 2003 documentary *Super Size Me*) gently lampooned the hippy-dippy, tree-hugging ethos coexisting comfortably with financial success. "It seems like only 10 years ago you were all talking about saving the world, sitting around in a hot tub, eating vegan food, smoking weed--and look at you now!" he joked to the crowd. "For all you people here who voted for the Green Party candidate for President, you get to meet everybody else who voted for the Green Party candidate for President. You're all here." (He wasn't being entirely hyperbolic. How many other events offer vegan alternatives not only for the entrée but also for dessert?)

Onstage, the honorees reaffirmed their commitment to a range of causes, from Conley's quest to measure the "emotional fist print" of companies on employees and their families to Jeffrey Hollender's desire to help the poorest communities in the United States leverage "wonderful assets that they can turn into a brighter future." Many described the influence of SVN on their work and lives. "I remember the first time I came to SVN," said Eileen Fisher, founder of the namesake fashion brand. "We were sitting in a circle, and they went around and wanted to know what our passions were. I had never sat in a circle before, and no one had ever asked me about my passion. That really inspired me. Now, at Eileen Fisher, we always sit in circles, and we always ask people, 'What's your passion?'"

Anyone who considered social entrepreneurship a recent phenomenon would have been quickly disabused. In conversations before the ceremony, many attendees described starting companies in the '80s and even in the '70s, during the first blush of the green movement. "I've been doing fair trade and organic since before most people used the words *fair trade* and *organic*," said Scott Leonard, co-founder and CEO of [Indigenous](#), which manufactures organic clothes using networks of artisans in the poorest regions of South America.

The event also signaled a passing of the baton to the next generation. During the reception, dozens of more-recent entrepreneurs mingled with and sought advice and support from their predecessors. Many of those younger founders are tackling the big issues in inventive and idiosyncratic ways. So, for example, Nikhil Arora and Alejandro Velez promote sustainability and reconnect people with their food through [Back to the Roots](#), a company that makes sustainable mushroom-growing kits. Mal Warwick is a partner in the [One World Futbol Project](#), which delivers virtually indestructible soccer balls to children in refugee camps and other harsh environments.

But perhaps it's more accurate to say these entrepreneurs are sharing the baton rather than passing it. Judy Wicks and Laury Hammel--both founders of socially conscious companies--accepted their award for creating the [Business Alliance for Local Living Economies \(BALLE\)](#). The two have been champions of sustainable business for more than 30 years, and an exuberant Hammel made clear they had no plans to slow down. "It's time to take a stand," he exhorted the cheering audience. "We've got a lot of work to do. Even though a lot of us are turning 65, we're just getting started. Let's go!"

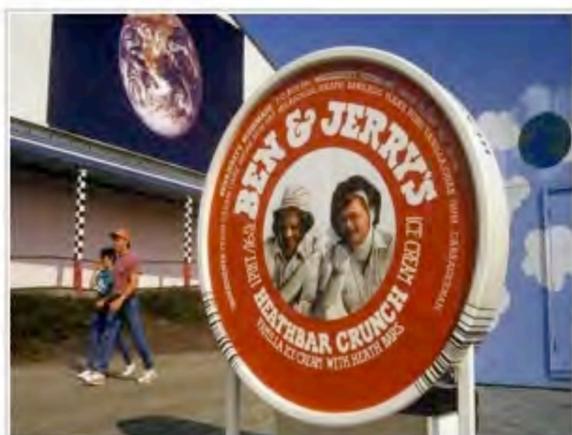


Leigh Buchanan is an editor at large for Inc. magazine. A former editor at Harvard Business Review and founding editor of WebMaster magazine, she writes regular columns on leadership and workplace culture. @LeighEBuchanan

How the Social Venture Network changed business in America

By **Marc Gunther**

Published November 20, 2012



Ben Cohen, of **Ben & Jerry's** renown, is asking me for money, and he's not selling ice cream. I give him a dollar bill, he stamps it in red ink — NOT TO BE USED FOR BRIBING POLITICIANS — and returns it to me. It's part of his new crusade to get corporate money out of politics.

"Corporations are not people, and money is not free speech," Cohen declares.

The 61-year-old ice-cream mogul sold Ben & Jerry's to Unilever in 2000. The T-shirt says: "Stamp Money Out of Politics." These days, as "Head Stamper" at StampStampede, Cohen is

working for an amendment to the US Constitution to get money out of politics.

It sounds improbable but no more improbable than this: that a gathering of about 70 people, including Ben and his partner Jerry Greenfield, at the rustic Gold Lake Mountain Resort not far from Boulder, Colorado, Colorado back in 1987 could spawn a movement that has changed the way millions of Americans think about and do business.

The Gold Lake get-together led to the creation of the **Social Venture Network (SVN)**, a group of businesspeople, investors and philanthropists, many of them shaped by the political and cultural movements of the 1960s, who believe that business can change the world for the better. About 700 SVN members, friends and family gathered last week in New York for a **25th anniversary dinner and celebration** — a time to assess how far their movement to remake business has come, and how far it needs to go.

The
Gunther
Report

The dinner was a star-studded affair, at least for those of us who pay attention to businesses that aim to build a more just and sustainable economy. On hand along with Ben and Jerry were Eileen Fisher of the eponymous clothing company, Gary Hirshberg of **Stonyfield Farm**, Drew and Myra Goodman of **Earthbound Organic**, George Siemon of dairy co-op **Organic Valley**, **Jeffrey Hollender**, formerly of **Seventh Generation**, **Chip Conley**, founder of **Joie de Vivre Hotels**, Roger Brown and Linda Mason of **Bright Horizons**, Amy Domini of **Domini Social Investments**, all of whom were named to the SVN "Hall of Fame."

Spotted in the crowd of 700 or so were **Gifford Pinchot III**, president of **Bainbridge Graduate Institute**, my friends **Seth Goldman** of **Honest Tea** and author **Mark Albion** (*More Than Money: Questions Every MBA Needs to Answer*), **Danny Kennedy** of **Sungevity**—the closest thing to a power elite of the sustainable business movement.

Photo of entrance to Ben & Jerry's factory by Spirit of America via Shutterstock.

Next page: What the SVN did for corporate social responsibility

None of them, to be sure, run FORTUNE 500 companies. But the movement birthed by SVN powered the field of corporate social responsibility, opened up new possibilities for entrepreneurs, raised expectations that big companies now need to meet and helped shape the way companies ranging from Google ("Don't be Evil") to Walmart do what they do.

In a letter inviting the pioneers who would form SVN to Gold Lake, **Wayne Silby** of **Calvert Investments** and philanthropist and investor **Josh Mailman** wrote:

An opportunity exists for us to build a new American story, a new American parable, a new American mythology, which can provide an alternative and rewarding vision for some of the economic choices that face our culture.

Yes, they were dreaming big. But even at that first gathering—where people got to know while smoking pot, or sitting in hot tubs, or doing both at once—valuable connections were made. Ben Cohen took a walk with **Bernard Glassman**, a Brooklyn-born Zen Buddhist master who had started the **Greyston Bakery** in Yonkers, NY, to help alleviate poverty. Soon after, Ben & Jerry's become Greyston's biggest customer, using its brownies in ice cream flavors like **Chocolate Fudge Brownie**. I wrote about Greyston in my book, *Faith and Fortune*. "We don't hire people to bake brownies," the bakery says. "We bake brownies to hire people."

The 1960s were alive and well in 1987 at Gold Lake. Mailman once said that SVN and a predecessor group that became the **Threshold Foundation** were shaped by "a generation of people interested in meditation, Buddhism, Shamanism, rainbow gatherings, and Burning Man." These were people who didn't want to check their beliefs, emotions, personalities or principles at the door when they went to work. They were taking their values into the business world.

"SVN totally inspired me," Eileen Fisher said at last week's dinner, recalling an early SVN gathering where people sat in a circle and talked about their passions. "I had never sat in a circle before, and no one had ever asked me what my passion was," she joked. She brought the practice back to her company, which has earned a reputation as a good employer that provides generous profit-sharing, education and wellness benefits to its people.

Next page: Inspiring B Corp and BSR

The SVN ethos infiltrated big companies. **Stonyfield Yogurt**, which began with a couple of organic cows, got big, got acquired by Group Danone and now can be found in Walmarts around America. **Seventh Generation** told people what was in all of its cleaning products, and bigger rivals were forced to do the same. Perhaps more important, a generation or two of young people demanded more from their employers than a paycheck and a pension; they wanted to find meaning and purpose at work, too.

I asked Ben Cohen and Wayne Silby, as SVN veterans, what they saw as the organization's biggest accomplishment, and what important work is left to be done.

Cohen cited the work of **B Lab**, a nonprofit that has devised a new corporate structure, called the **B Corp**, that is designed to harness the power of business to solve social and environmental problems. "B Corps and B Lab are a tremendous success and an outgrowth of SVN," he said. Those groups, he said, bring objective, measurable standards to the question of what constitutes a good business, and the B Corp structure "legalizes a corporation factoring in more than just making money into its decision-making." Cohen also pointed to the creation and growth of two business schools, the **Bainbridge Graduate Institute** and the **Presidio Graduate School**, that focus on the social and environmental impacts of business.

Social Venture Network also spun off an organization that became **Business for Social Responsibility (BSR)**, the global network of several hundred mostly-big companies that focuses on corporate responsibility and sustainability issues. Unlike SVN, where individuals and companies are vetted before they can belong, BSR invites in all comers—it's a church that opens its doors to sinners is how a former BSR exec once put it. SVN also spawned **Net Impact**, a organization of MBAs, college students and young professionals who use their business skills to work for good. [Disclosure: I'm on Net Impact's board.]

The big job ahead, Cohen said, is to get money out of politics. "There's a reason why government is working for corporations and for the one percent," he said.

Silby, for his part, cited the strength of SVN's "sangha" — a Sanskrit word meaning association or community — as its biggest accomplishment.

"A community keeps fueling your belief system and gives you the energy to keep you moving forward," he said.

He said SVN's belief that business exists not just to generate profits but to make a difference in the world had spread among younger people and outside the U.S.

What's needed, he said, is a rigorous way of accounting for the full impacts of business.

"We still have a lot of people graduating with MBAs who think 7 percent is more than 6 percent." That's not so, he said, if a company's social and environmental costs are being borne by others. "People aren't thinking about the whole," he said.

He's right about that—too many companies focus narrowly on their short-term returns, and the rest of us too often pay the price. Just this week, BP agreed to pay a \$4.5 billion fine in connection with the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and JPMorgan Chase and Credit Suisse agreed to pay a combined \$416.9 million to settle charges that they misled investors in the sale of risky mortgage bonds before 2008 financial crisis. There's still a lot of ugliness out there in corporate America.

But at the same time, the progress made by the responsible business movement has been remarkable. Curious about how it all began, I asked Ben Cohen what led him and Jerry, his junior high school buddy from Long Island, to open their ice cream shop in Burlington, Vt., back in 1978.

"I wanted to be a potter," he told me, "but I couldn't sell my pottery"

"And we're all grateful for that," I replied.



GreenBiz.com Senior Writer **Marc Gunther** is a longtime journalist and speaker whose focus is business and sustainability. Marc maintains a blog at MarcGunther.com. You can follow him on Twitter @[marcgunther](https://twitter.com/marcgunther).

Read more from **Marc Gunther**

High Fashion with Native Roots

Indigenous founder Scott Leonard blazes a trail from hardscrabble Andes villages to Saks and Bloomingdale's.



Scott Leonard's passions for design, the environment, and social justice came together in the mountains of Ecuador. That's where he conceived the idea of artisans using traditional tools and natural fibers to create clothes fashionable enough for the U.S. market. Indigenous is the first premium fashion company to receive fair trade certification: its new Fair Trace Tool lets customers use smart phones to see how and by whom their garments were made. Leonard talked about forging a modern supply chain from old-world elements with Inc. editor-at-large Leigh Buchanan:

In the early 90s I was employed as a fruit shake maker in a natural-foods restaurant. One day I was late for work, running down a street in Palo Alto, and in the intersection I knocked down this shorter Ecuadorian individual. His books and groceries went flying all over the place. The lights turned green. People were beeping their horns. I picked him up; helped him gather his things, and then helped him across the street. I felt so bad that I brought him into the restaurant I was working at and made him a fruit smoothie. That man was Joe Flood. He's the person I started the company with.

Right away Joe and I made a pact that one day we would do something in business that was extraordinary. I spent the next couple of years running an environmental surf shop, and he worked with me a little bit on that. Then we had the opportunity to take a trip to Ecuador together. In the Andes we saw these women who were knitting in cooperatives, and we wanted to help them. They had incredible skills, but they weren't being paid or honored for them. At the time they were making these sort of bulky, rough sweaters. We thought if we could shape their skills to produce something more market-ready, with better designs and yarn and quality control, and if we could help them with marketing, then we could dictate a better price and give them a better wage.

We started making regular trips into these desolate regions of the Andes. We relied on the NGOs for help, because they were already working in these communities. They gave us the structure to interact with them. It was too much for us to orchestrate on our own. Right now we work with more than 275 little tiny groups that represent more than 1,500 artisans.

About a year after we started the company we brought in Matt Reynolds, who is my working partner. He and I share a lot of the day-to-day and have throughout the 18 years of the business.

This journey with Indigenous has been about scaling jobs at the base of the pyramid. Not only how do you take a skill and add quality control but also how do you elevate an entire supply chain, all the way from the fields of organic cotton through textile manufacturers and yarn makers. Then you have to deliver the material to these remote areas where the artisans live in pockets of as few as three to 30 women. They are working with the same tools they've always used: needles and lap looms. You have to show them the new designs, manage quality control, and do everything necessary to get the product in the store.

To fund these collectives we had to go beyond micro-credit lending. Because some of them might need one or two thousand dollars but some of the larger ones might need more. So we brought in Root Capital, which finances about 80% of our supply chain. We make the artisans financially literate, organize them into quality-control hubs where they deliver their products, and pay field ops to hand out money to them.

We met some people from Eileen Fisher's company through the [Social Venture Network](#). They fell in love with the idea of the artisan supply chain. We now produce through the indigenous supply chain thousands and thousands of sweaters for Eileen Fisher over the years as a private label. We've been doing that for almost seven years. The products are in Neiman Marcus, Bloomingdale's and Saks Fifth Avenue. Private label for Eileen Fisher and others is about 50% of revenues. The rest comes from our own brand, which is in 500 different stores across the United States.

We like to say that the sweet spot of Indigenous is someplace between sustainability and serendipity.



Leigh Buchanan is an editor at large for *Inc.* magazine. A former editor at *Harvard Business Review* and founding editor of *WebMaster* magazine, she writes regular columns on leadership and workplace culture. [@LeighEBuchanan](#)

SNAPS: After Sandy, donors support slew of causes, from Encores! to malaria



Jenna Gang

SVN's 25th anniversary celebration



Linda Mason, Bill Drayton, Cheryl Dorsey, Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield are honored at SVN's 25th anniversary celebration at Gotham Hall on Nov. 13. More than 700 entrepreneurs who have used business to address social needs came to the event.

Renewal Partners founders to join social venture hall of fame

BY DERRICK PENNER, VANCOUVER SUN NOVEMBER 13, 2012

Carol Newell and Joel Solomon, the founders of Vancouver-based venture capital firm Renewal Partners, will be named today as inaugural inductees to the U.S.-based Social Venture Network's Hall of Fame alongside Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus and other sustainability luminaries.

They will be inducted, along with Yunus, the micro-financing guru, in the category of Fearless Financiers during a New York ceremony celebrating the Social Venture Network's 25th anniversary.

And the inaugural cohort includes Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, of Ben & Jerry's ice cream fame, the late Anita Rod-dick, founder of the Body Shop, and Virgin Group impresario Richard Branson.

Solomon said the recognition is gratifying for Renewal Partners, which started essentially as an experiment to see if they could invest Newell's capital into businesses that fit with her social conscience and make money.

The Renewal Partners fund invested in such locally known businesses as Happy Planet juices and the Small Potatoes Urban Delivery (SPUD) organic grocery delivery service.

From that, in 2008, Solomon said he and co-principal Paul Richardson formed the Renewal 2 Investment Fund, a larger-scale venture fund that raised \$35 million in outside capital.

And where the initial Renewal Partners fund was essentially a seed fund for start-ups, Solomon describes Renewal 2 as more of a growth fund placing investments of between \$1 million and \$3 million. Renewal 2 has placed investments with 11 companies including Aquatic Informatics, a firm that makes software for water testing, and Seventh Generation, a developer of environmentally friendly household cleaning supplies.

"I feel that we've, first of all, survived while breaking the mould, and pioneering new territory - that's quite an accomplishment," Solomon said in an interview.

"The fact that we could successfully attract investments, and place investments in this many companies and have successful companies, I feel very proud of."

The Social Venture Network was formed in 1987 by members who wanted to create a business environment that would "simultaneously benefit investors, employers, local communities and the planet."

depenner@vancouversun.com [Twitter.com/derrickpenner](https://twitter.com/derrickpenner)



Olive Oil
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**OLIVE OIL FROM SPAIN
RESTAURANT WEEK**

**MASTER CHEF LOLO MANSO CREATES A JOURNEY OF THE SENSES
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Use Extra Virgin Olive Oil and You Might Just “Forget to Die”

Find out about the incredible health benefits of this grocery store staple, and how to make sure you get the most out of it.

By Perri O. Blumberg



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healthy olive oil was a potential reason that inhabitants of the Greek Island Ikaria just “forget to die.” TV chef Cat Cora told us, “My family in Greece drinks half a cup of extra virgin olive oil [EVOO] and warm lemon water in the morning for weight loss and health. They absolutely swear by it for keeping hunger pangs in check, helping with body maintenance, health and longevity.”

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Olive oil might be the key to longer life.

Greeks consume more olive oil than any other country (about 26 liters per person annually), and their Mediterranean diet has been linked to lower cancer rates, risks of heart disease, and occurrence of Parkinson's and Alzheimer's diseases.

Recently, the *New York Times Magazine* wrote that heart-

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Try it for pain relief.

The Monell Chemical Senses Center found that Ibuprofen and EVOO have the same kind of anti-inflammatory properties, even though the substances are otherwise completely unrelated. Their polyphenols (a type of antioxidant) act on the same receptor in the back of your throat, which is what can cause a ticklish sensation for some when they swallow it.

The Koroneiki varietal of EVOO in particular has the highest quotient of polyphenols, which also makes it great for external relief and beauty treatments on skin, hair, and scalp.

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fumes and harmful free radicals (the stuff we're trying to prevent in the first place). A good rule of thumb: The more refined the oil, the higher its smoke point."

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EVOO might cut down on accidental carcinogens.

The smoke point of EVOO is almost 400 degrees, which is much higher than other popular cooking oils like canola (200 degrees), or corn and non-virgin olive oils (around 320 degrees each). According to the [Cleveland Clinic](#), "[H]eating oil above its smoke point—the temperature at which the oil begins to smoke—produces toxic

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Olive oil is full of healthy fats.

If a recipe calls for canola oil or butter, you can simply swap in olive oil. According to our food editor, use about $\frac{3}{4}$ the amount listed (even if you're baking cakes, muffins, and breads), and you'll cut back on calories, saturated fats, and bad cholesterol.

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Courtesy of Olive Oil from Spain

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"Light" doesn't necessarily mean healthier.

Every olive oil has the same cholesterol and fat content, and they all have around 120 calories per tablespoon. A bottle classified as "light" is referring to the oil's color and flavor.

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Labels can lie.

"Bottled in Italy" doesn't make it better; plus, the fine print might be: "May contain oils from Spain, Greece, Morocco, Tunisia." That means most of the oil was likely produced elsewhere, before being shipped overseas to obtain that luxurious, coveted, they-can-charge-more Italian labeling.

The University of California, Davis [conducted a study in](#)

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2012 that showed over 65% of the EVOO found on grocery store shelves did not test as "Extra Virgin", even though they were labeled that way, and instead contained other oils as fillers, and for additional color and flavoring.

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Olive oil can expire.

Bright supermarkets can speed up the oxidation process if the oil sits there for too long, and it can go rancid. As long as it's stored away from heat and light, however, an unopened bottle of good quality olive oil should last for up to two years from its bottling date. Once you open it, you should use it all in a few months.

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Courtesy of Olive Oil from Spain

Olive Oil, Euphoria Greek Extra Virgin Olive Oil, Fran Gage *author and olive oil expert*, Theo Stephan *founder of Global Gardens and author of Olive Oil and Vinegar for Life*, Monell Chemical Senses Center, Olive Oil Times, Rip Esselstyn, *author of The Engine 2 Diet*. *Inspired by “The Island Where People Forget to Die” in the New York Times Magazine.*

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Who knew: It takes 1,375 olives just to make one 32-ounce bottle of olive oil.

That's over 15 pounds!

Sources: Marco Petrini, President of Monini North America, Inc., Olive Oil from Spain, Cat Cora chef and TV personality, founder of Cat Cora's Kitchen by Gaea, Kaldi

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NEXT IN TECH

APP FOR THAT

Another Taxi App Is Coming to New York

After setting up in the U.K., Israel and Russia, GetTaxi is headed for the big city.

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By Adrienne Jeffries 6/08 8:47am



Ms. Herman. (Photo: Twitter)

There is something alluring to entrepreneurs about the New York taxi system. Mainly, it's messy. One taxi drives around W. 4th St., looking for fares, while around the corner a frazzled passenger tries vainly to hail one of the occupied cabs on Seventh Ave. *How inefficient! There should be an app for this*, thinks the entrepreneur.

And that's how **GetTaxi** came to be. Technology has changed, but the way we hail cabs has not, the company says. After bringing its app to Israel, London and Moscow, GetTaxi has raised \$20 million and set its sights on New York, where it will launch in the coming months, said Jing Wang Herman, CEO of GetTaxi USA. "The customer experience for taxis has really been the same for decades," she said. "I think everyone would agree that there's definitely room for improvement." Ms. Herman has lived in New

York for 12 years. She went to NYU, worked on Wall Street, and got her taxi license in 2009. She's been thinking about the taxi business for a while. GetTaxi plans to build out a team in New York in the "next few months"—she was mum on specifics—and then launch in the city before moving on to the rest of the nation.

We've been chronicling the **trouble** that San Francisco-based car service **Uber** has had breaking into the New York market for a while. GetTaxi also matches drivers to passengers and relies on customers' smartphones to make the experience of getting a cab that much easier. However, this app is for taxis, not black cars, and it's free for passengers.

Drivers get a plug-and-play device that will let them join the GetTaxi network, find passengers, and crowdsource where to find fares. GetTaxi charges its corporate customers, who use it to manage their travel costs. GetTaxi is being used by Google, PriceWaterhouseCooper, Disney, hotels, law firms and hedge funds, Ms. Herman said. GetTaxi also offers enterprise clients a website where it's easy for executives or their assistants to book a car, and 24-hour human customer service with real live humans.

New York City just issued a **request for proposals** "for a smartphone application that will allow passengers to pay their cab fare with their smart phone." GetTaxi can do that, but it can do much more, Ms. Herman said, like allow passengers to specify if they want an eco-friendly car or a wheelchair-accessible car. Other possibilities include cab-sharing and paying with a family account. "There's a ton more that you could do with technology. I think New Yorkers specifically are ready for this."

The company plans to submit a proposal in response to the city's RFP, but it will launch in New York regardless of whether it's accepted.

She cited the ideas proposed for the last Big Apps competition. "People said, 'why isn't there an app to hail a taxi? Why can't I pay for a taxi for my child remotely? Why can't I track when my girlfriend got home safely? How do I share a taxi?' These days there's an app for everything. There's really superior technology and it's time that we bring that solution to New York."

GetTaxi has \$30 million in funding total and currently employs 110 people worldwide. The app has launched in Moscow, London and in 13 cities in Israel.

Adrienne Jeffries is the editor of Betabeat. Follow Adrienne on [Twitter](#) or via [RSS](#). ajeffries@observer.com

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What are you going to do straight after university? The time after your graduation is a good opportunity to do something totally different! Go abroad for a few months and break a Guinness world record can be one of them.

That's what happened to 3 university friends Paul, 25, from Stroud, Gloucestershire, Johno, 28, from Leeds, and Leigh, 24, from Burntwood. The trio, friends from Birmingham's Aston University, decided to start the most expensive trip around the world by taxi!



On board of a 20 year old black cab , called Hanna, they went through 50 nations in 15 months. Total cost of the ride £80,000.

The idea to travel the world in a black cab came while the boys were in a taxi on their way home from a night out.

We thought: why not see if we can run up the world's longest, most expensive taxi journey, and do it all for charity?

Initially the three intrepid friends planned a trip from London to Sidney. However when the smartphone app [Get Taxi](#) heard of their adventure, they decided to help the trio and gave them the opportunity to complete an epic taxi ride around the world.



The taxi adventure of the British trio Paul Archer, Leigh Purnell and Johno Ellison raised 20.000 for the British RedCross(5.000 provided by smartphone app Get Taxi).

Neil Fullman, CEO of Get Taxi UK said: 'The lads have much to be proud of.

'And we're of course thrilled that we have helped them to embark and complete an epic journey that few, if anyone, will ever experience.

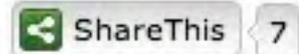
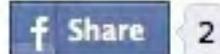
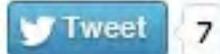
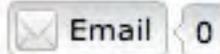
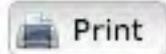
'It is great to have played a significant part in helping them to both realize their goal and achieve record-breaking history.'

What are you waiting for? Catch a taxi and start your personal adventure!

Post edited by guest blogger [Selamawit Tesfai](#)



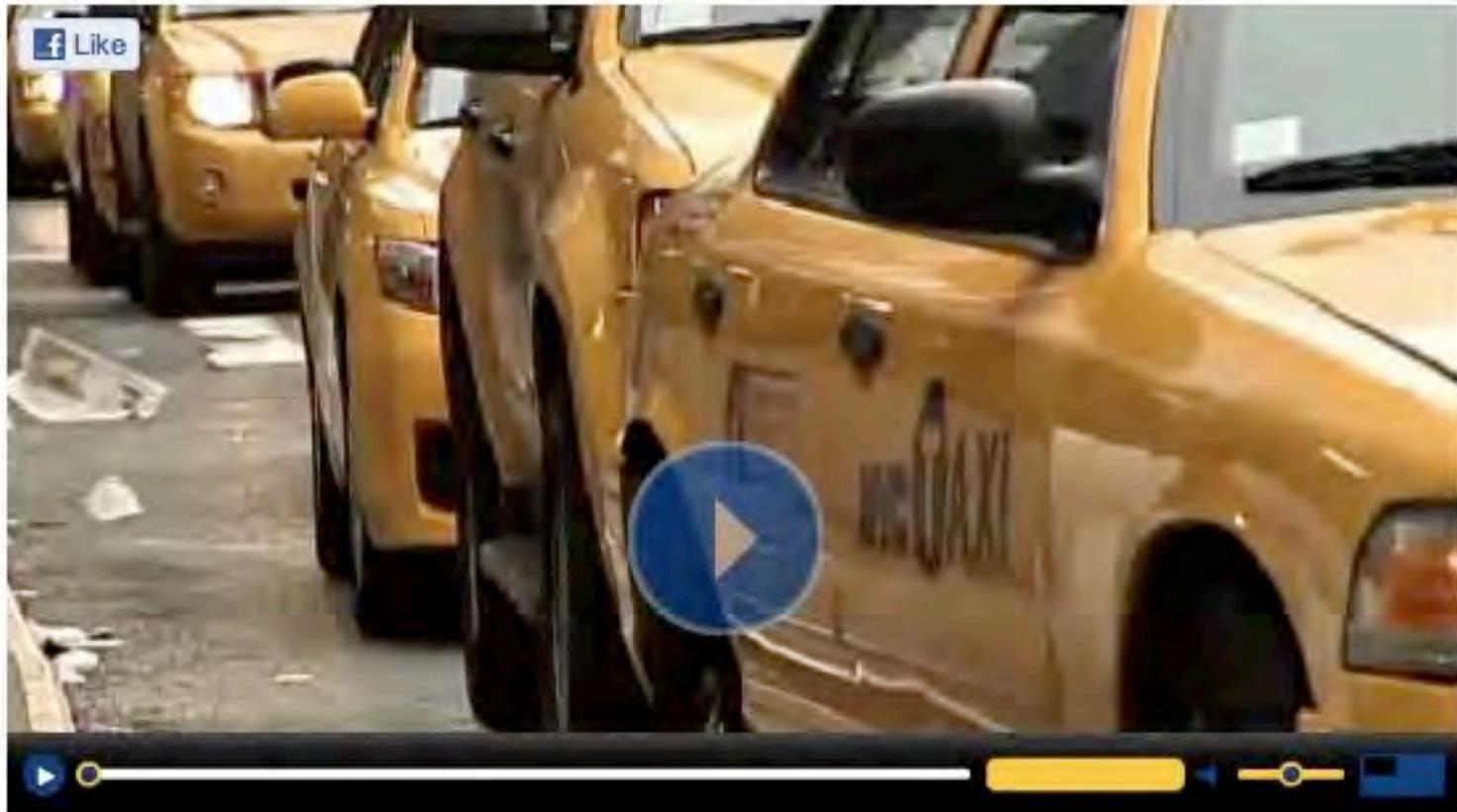
POLITICS



Updated 06/06/2012 05:37 PM

City Seeks Proposals For Taxi Payment App

By: NY1 News



The city's Taxi and Limousine Commission is now accepting proposals for an app that would allow riders to pay their fares with a smartphone.

They say they would also consider an app that allows people to hail a cab, but they point out that cab drivers are not allowed to use handheld devices.

The deadline to submit a proposal for the payment app is next Thursday.

Meanwhile, the tech company GetTaxi announced they secured \$20 million in funding to support a launch of its app in the city.

The company says it already had success with the app in London, Moscow and Israel.

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DISRUPTOR OF THE DAY: GETTAXI – REVOLUTIONIZING PUBLIC TRANSIT

DAILY DISRUPTION ⌚ JUNE 6, 2012 💬 1



By [Bill Klump](#) | [@TheKlumper](#)

Get Taxi is a simple and instant way to order taxis from your mobile phone or the [GetTaxi](#) website. With Get Taxi you get control, with access to driver and vehicle information and real-time views of taxis you order. You can rank drivers, view previous ride details, and even earn miles points toward free rides and other bonuses.

Following successful international expansion, strong growth and performance, GetTaxi, has also announced today that it has secured \$20 million in follow-on funding. The investment follows GetTaxi's successful entry into the UK, Russian and Israeli markets, and the new funds will support a New York City launch in the coming months.

The latest \$20 million of funding is a follow-on investment by Len Blavatnik's Access Industries, a global industrial and investment firm which owns Warner Music and other cutting edge companies, with participation by company founders Shahar Waiser and Roi More.

Founded in 2010, GetTaxi has live operations in UK, Russia, and Israel – countries that together represent a \$15 billion annual market potential, which is two-thirds of the entire European taxi market. With live operations in the Middle East, Western Europe and Eastern Europe, GetTaxi is the largest international player in the industry.

GetTaxi gives people a quick and easy way to order a taxi from their Android, iPhone, Blackberry devices or web. GetTaxi's drivers are equipped with a dedicated "plug-and-ride" driver unit which allows any taxi driver join GetTaxi and start earning money immediately.

"This funding will enable us to provide the same remarkable service across the world's major metropolises: NYC, London and Moscow. Already today, at peak times, there is a GetTaxi ride being booked every second somewhere in the world," said Shahar Waiser, Founder and CEO of GetTaxi. "We believe consumers and businesses deserve the ability to book and pay for a taxi quickly and securely at the click of a button on their smartphone from anywhere. GetTaxi's vision is to change the industry in such a way that taxis will be affordable for everyone, and available in less than a minute. This will make GetTaxi the preferred choice for getting around the city."

As a global market leader, GetTaxi's expansion continues with a launch planned for New York City.

"New York City is taking big steps to improve ground transportation and GetTaxi is poised to help make this transformation a reality," said Jing Wang Herman, CEO of GetTaxi USA. "Imagine, knowing you'll always be able to find a cab, no matter what part of the city you're in, and knowing exactly how long it will take to find you. We are excited to bring the GetTaxi revolution to the most iconic city for taxis in the world."

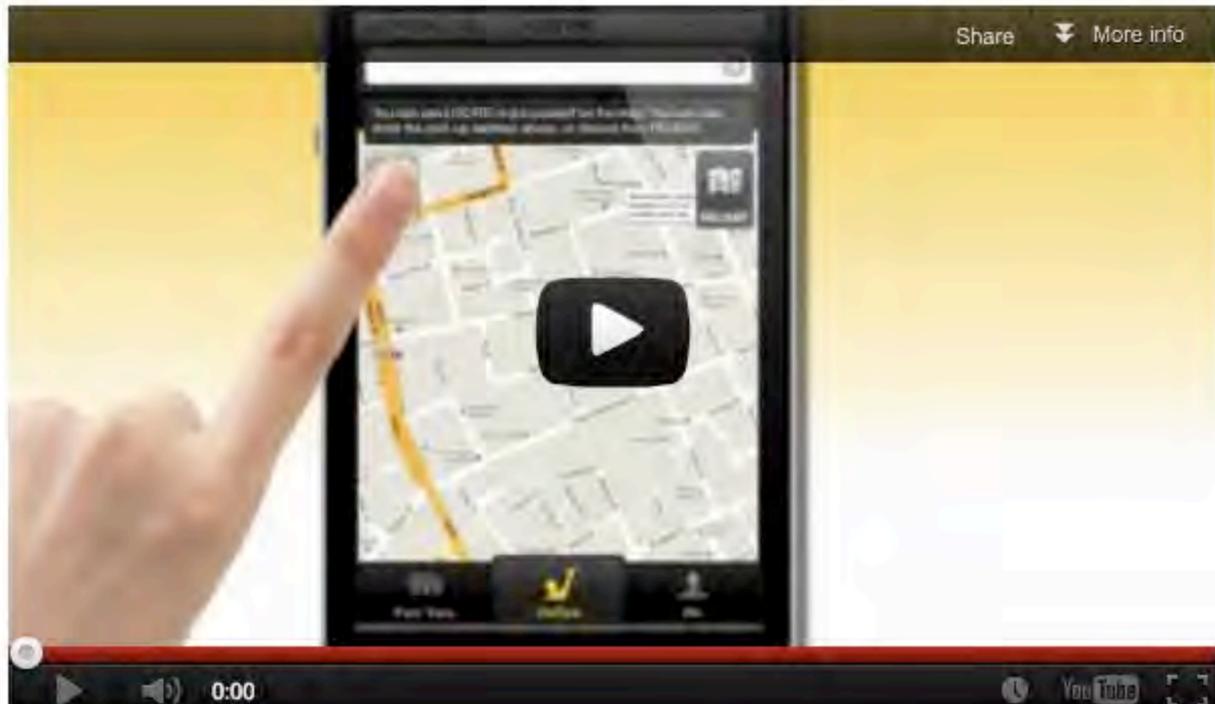
Herman is a New York City resident and recent Forbes 30-under-30 member who left a career in finance to lead GetTaxi's U.S. effort. She is the proud holder of a New York City taxi license.

GetTaxi's rapid growth comes from an innovative mix of technology that benefits private consumers, as well as enterprise clients (including many Fortune 500 companies), drivers and fleets.

GetTaxi's drivers are equipped with a dedicated "plug-and-ride" driver unit which allows them to minimize wasted cruising time, make more money, and also crowd source jobs for each other. GetTaxi meets with and trains every driver to ensure a remarkable consumer experience at every touch point, and has fundamentally transformed both the driver and passenger experience in all of its markets. GetTaxi even cut out the awkward payment process hustle at the end of the ride. GetTaxi is the only player that enables payment by credit card, voucher or enterprise account.

"We are confident that the GetTaxi phenomenon will spread fast and wide and we plan to be available in all major taxi markets around the world," said Waiser.

For more information on our "Disruptor of the Day", please watch this short video and be sure to visit www.GetTaxi.com



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This App Will Revolutionize the NYC Taxi Experience



June 07, 2012 by Alex Fitzpatrick

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City dwellers, we've all been there: It's the after-work rush hour, the heavens have opened up in a torrential downpour and all you want is a taxi, but there's none to be found.

Good news: A revolutionary digital service called GetTaxi, which has hit it big in Russia, Israel and the U.K., aims to make sure that never happens again. The better news is that it's finally coming to New York in the next few months.

GetTaxi provides users an easy-to-use interface for digitally ordering a cab via their smartphones or desktop computers. Once an order is made, a cab driver using GetTaxi receives a notification that somebody's waiting at a certain location, and they hit the gas to pick up the fare. Smartphone users are even able to see their requested taxi finding its way to their location via GPS tracking on their mobile device the same way they can follow a pizza delivery.

New York City's Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) is accepting applications from companies such as GetTaxi who want to bring mobile payments to the Big Apple's cabs. While the TLC's only requesting a mobile payments app thus far, GetTaxi's founder and CEO, Jing Wang Herman, is jumping at the opportunity to gain a foothold in the New York City market in preparation for the future.

"GetTaxi will bring New York City a far superior user experience as far as taxis are concerned," Herman told *Mashable*. "Our users will be able to easily and securely book a taxi in one click. In five years, the taxi experience won't look anything like it does today."

Herman's not the only one who thinks taxis are overdue for digital disruption: Investors have put \$20 million behind GetTaxi to give it gas for its planned New York City rollout.

GetTaxi will not have its own fleet of drivers, but rather it will compliment the service of existing taxi fleets. When a driver signs on to the platform, GetTaxi trains them in the product and in customer service. Customer service lines will be open 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Herman believes all of this will revolutionize the New York City taxi experience if her company is approved by the TLC.

"When a driver gets onto the grid, we educate them on what the getTaxi experience is all about and what the customer experience is all about," said Herman. "In the countries where we are, we've changed how people view taxi drivers. We've heard lots of 'wow' stories about drivers going above and beyond. For example, a recent one involved a passenger leaving something in a taxi, and because we had her information, the driver was able to call the passenger directly and return the lost item to her."

SEE ALSO: Cutting-Edge Taxi of Tomorrow Coming to New York City in 2013 [PICS]

The platform is also business-friendly, with an option for companies to sign up to allow employees or guests to easily hail cabs on a company account.

"For a family or a business, it's like having a phone plan you pay for on a monthly basis," said Herman.

GetTaxi won't immediately be available for New York City's yellow taxis, which are legally prohibited from taking a booking through a radio device. Herman, however, is confident she'll be able to persuade the relevant parties that what she called "digital dispatch" is superior to the on-the-ground hail.

As an example, she suggested that if a yellow cab driver knows a handful of people are all nearby and they want to go to a similar location, it's more economically efficient to pick them all up.

"If everyone's on the grid, we'll be able to match you with other people trying to get to midtown for their morning meeting," said Herman, who's also hoping GetTaxi will be used with the recently announced outer borough green taxis, a partnership which she believes will vastly improve the ground transportation system outside Manhattan.

Herman said the thing that separates GetTaxi from other similar services is that her company wants to be an affordable product "for the masses, the 99%."

While working on the New York City rollout, Herman will also be driving around the city in her own cab, for which she has a license, giving people free rides in exchange for hearing their thoughts on how the taxi experience could be improved.

"I love talking to strangers, so I'll be driving around giving free rides and talking to New Yorkers about their taxi experience and what they'd love to see changed," she said.

How can digital technology change the taxi experience for the better, not just in New York but anywhere? Share your thoughts with us in the comments.

Image courtesy of iStockphoto, gianlucabartoli

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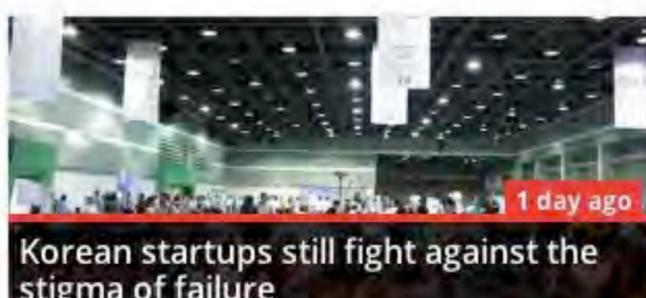
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GAMESBEAT**GetTaxi CEO actually a cab driver, sets sights on NYC**

June 6, 2012 6:00 AM

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Meghan Kelly



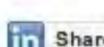
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12



Yellow cabs are everywhere in New York. You stand on a corner, hold up your hand, and suddenly one appears to take you wherever you need to go. Israel-based **GetTaxi** still sees room for improvement, however, and has raised \$20 million to expand into the Big Apple.

GetTaxi places GPS components into taxi cabs, and provides customers with an application to flag down a cab using their mobile phones. Right off the bat, the company has some major challenges ahead of it. The mobile-taxi-app space is a full one, with companies like TaxiMojo, Uber, and Hailo already operating. Many also feel that this kind of company survives in places where hailing taxi cabs is a nightmare, one of the reasons why Uber has had so much success in San Francisco.

But GetTaxi is inspired by New York City's Mayor Bloomberg, and his **Big Apps challenge**. That is, the city of New York opened up its data to developers around the world to come up with app-solutions to problems in NYC. According to Herman, polls indicated that people wanted to see apps helping New Yorkers pay for taxis.

"2012 is the biggest year in new york transit," said GetTaxi's United States chief executive Jing Wang Herman in an interview with VentureBeat. "Right now timing is perfect for NY because I think the residents really are demanding something new."

Using this funding, GetTaxi will submit a request for proposal to the New York Taxi & Limousine Commission (TLC) that will include features like enterprise accounts and different payment options. GetTaxi also wants to build in a feature for splitting a taxi with others in your area. For example, if you live in Williamsburg and need to get to Midtown, you can see if anyone else in your area is requesting a similar trip, order the cab together, and split the cost.

Herman is actually a cab driver herself. After graduating NYU, she took a job with J.P. Morgan. She'd always been interested in cab drivers, and decided to work out a second job agreement with the financial firm to get her taxi drivers license. Now, as CEO of USA for GetTaxi, Herman says she will try to drive one of New York's classic Yellow Taxis every week, gleaning useful insight from her passengers.

"I had to jump through legal and compliance hoops at J.P. Morgan to get my taxi license," she laughed. "There have been bankers who leave finance to drive a taxi, but for me it was never out of necessity."

Competitor Hailo recently **received a \$17 million** round of funding from well-known venture firm Accel Partners. The London-based company, whose name stands for hailing a cab, provides an application-only solution that actually focuses on the cabbies as opposed to the customer. Hailo's idea is that if you give cabbies the tools to better serve their customers and the cab community, the services will naturally improve.

Herman says that GetTaxi is set apart from Hailo because it actually gets to know all of the drivers using its service, and brings them in for a consultations with GetTaxi's staff.

"We meet with all of our drivers one by one because we give them a GPS driver box," said Herman. "We teach them what the GetTaxi culture is...we actually train them on customer service."

GetTaxi also hold taxi-driver conferences and other events to hear from the drivers and create a bigger GetTaxi community. The company was founded in February 2010, and currently has big name clients such as Google and PwC using the enterprise service abroad. The round was led by Len Blavatnik's Access Industries, which led the company's first round of funding. It has received \$30 million in funding overall, has 110 employees and 400,000 downloads for its iPhone, Android, Blackberry, and Symbian apps.

Cab image via Shutterstock

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GetTaxi Grabs \$20 Million Funding To Bring NYC's Taxis Into The Digital Age



COLLEEN TAYLOR

Wednesday, June 6th, 2012

Comments



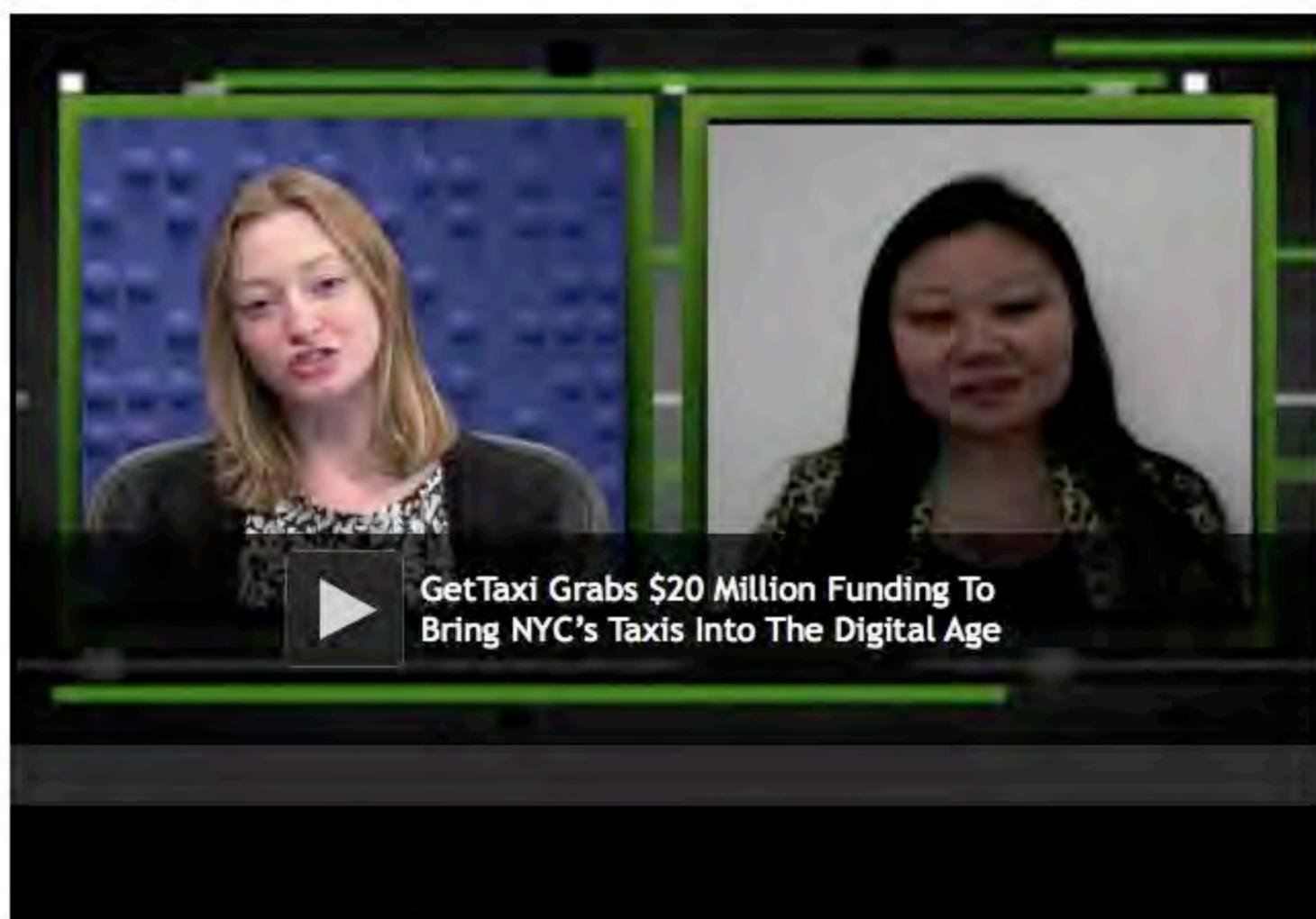
GetTaxi, an app aimed at letting people order taxis from their smartphones or via the web, has already gained **significant traction** in the UK, Russia and Israel. But now it has its sights set on conquering the United States — and New York City is the first on its list. So, the company is announcing today, it has raised \$20 million in brand new funding to help fund its expansion efforts.

The \$20 million serves as a follow-on funding round for GetTaxi, and it was led by previous investors Len Blavatnik's Access Industries with participation by company founders Shahar Waiser and Roi More. GetTaxi, which was founded in 2010, had previously raised \$11 million in outside venture capital, so this round brings its total outside funding to approximately \$30 million.

In the video embedded at the bottom of this post, you can see our interview with Jing Wang Herman, who joined GetTaxi last month to serve as its CEO of US operations. Herman has had a long career in the financial space as a banker, but she has a unique twist: She is also licensed to work as a New York City taxi driver. Herman told us that the taxi industry has long been a passion of hers, and that ordering a cab from a smartphone has been something she's envisioned for years, so the opportunity to expand GetTaxi's platform was one she had to jump at.

Of course, GetTaxi isn't without its competitors. In the higher-end personal transportation realm **Uber** has of course taken the space by storm in recent months, and in the cab market apps **such as Cabulous** have cracked other cities such as San Francisco, and apps **such as Hailo** have stated aims to get into the NYC market. With its experience growing in the international space, GetTaxi is positioning itself as a reliable and scalable new option — and one that New York City should choose as its **officially recommended** taxi-hailing smartphone app.

Right now, GetTaxi has 100 employees, with Herman the only full-timer in the United States. The company plans to add to its U.S. headcount as it grows in the months ahead. Its New York launch date is still not set, but it will occur sometime in the coming months, Herman says.



CRUNCHBASE

GETTAXI

Company:
GetTaxi

Website:
GetTaxi.com

Launch Date:
July 9, 2010

Funding:
\$30M

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GetTaxi is a simpler, faster way to order taxis from your mobile phone. Watch your taxi on a map in real time, pay for rides instantly and get rewards! GetTaxi is set to disrupt public transportation in Europe. it is already operational in London and Israel and rolling out in France, Germany and Moscow this year! GET SIMPLE With the GetTaxi mobile app you can get a taxi at the click of a button! No phone calls necessary—ordering is instant. Get it...



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GetTaxi Grabs \$20M from Access Industries, Catches a Ride to New York

João-Pierre S. Ruth | 6/6/12 | [Follow @jpruth](#)

An Israeli startup is bringing its Web and mobile app to the United States to help people who are tired of waving, whistling, and dancing around to hail cabs in busy cities. GetTaxi announced today it raised \$20 million, largely a follow-on investment from Access Industries, to help put its app to work in New York and other metropolises. The app, already in use in Israel, Russia, and Britain, lets people find and pay for taxis with their smartphones. For passengers with no time to spare, the app could streamline the way they get around town.



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GetTaxi, co-founded in 2010 in Israel by Shahar Waiser and Roi More, has thus far raised \$30 in total funding. Jing Wang Herman, CEO of GetTaxi USA, heads up the recently established New York-based U.S. headquarters for the company. The service—available in 15 cities outside the U.S.—was introduced in Britain in 2011 and then in Russia earlier this year. “The plan is to establish a global grid,” Herman says. Once the service is in place in the U.S., local users can hire taxis with the app even when overseas. “You can go to London, Moscow, or Israel and be able to use your New York phone and app to book and pay for a taxi.” If users pay for rides through the app, they also do not have to worry about converting currency, she says.

Individuals and businesses that use GetTaxi can put the word out through the app on iPhone, Android, and BlackBerry devices when they need rides. Herman says businesses largely use the company’s Web portal to book taxis. Participating taxi and livery car drivers in the vicinity receive alerts on a GPS-like device that directs them to their fares. The rider receives a confirmation message and estimated pick-up time after the driver takes the job. Passengers can pay with cash, but the GetTaxi service allows the fare to be paid with credit cards assigned to the app and also with Google Wallet.

The service is free for individual passengers to use. GetTaxi draws some of its revenue from dispatch fees paid by the drivers and car fleets that use its platform. Herman says the terms of such arrangements vary by city. In addition to picking up ... [NEXT PAGE »](#)

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João-Pierre S. Ruth is a correspondent for Xconomy based in the New York City area. He can be reached at jpruth@xconomy.com and followed on Twitter [@jpruth](#). [Follow @jpruth](#)

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GetTaxi Hails \$20M to Help Fund NYC Launch

June 06, 2012

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Get Taxi Inc., which runs an online and mobile taxi-ordering service, said it has secured a \$20 million follow-on investment to help fund its expansion to New York, home to thousands of the proverbial yellow cabs.

The inside round is primarily from Access Industries, with participation by company founders Roi More and Shahar Waiser. The Tel Aviv-based company, which goes by the name GetTaxi, said it has raised a total of \$30 million. Valuation wasn't disclosed....

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GetTaxi hails \$20m in funding as the Israeli startup eyes the NYC cab market

6TH JUNE 2012 by PAUL SAWERS

GetTaxi has announced a whopping \$20m funding round as the Israeli startup ramps up its international efforts and sets its sights on the lucrative NYC taxi market.

We've seen a surge in [taxi apps](#) in recent times, with the likes of Hailo [securing \\$17m in series A funding](#), and Uber continuing its own [global expansion](#) efforts.

With that in mind, GetTaxi has been gaining ground, recently rolling out [version 2.0 of its iOS app](#), followed quickly after by its Android counterpart. And with an extra \$20m in its coffers, GetTaxi is hoping to "transform" the taxi experience in The Big Apple.

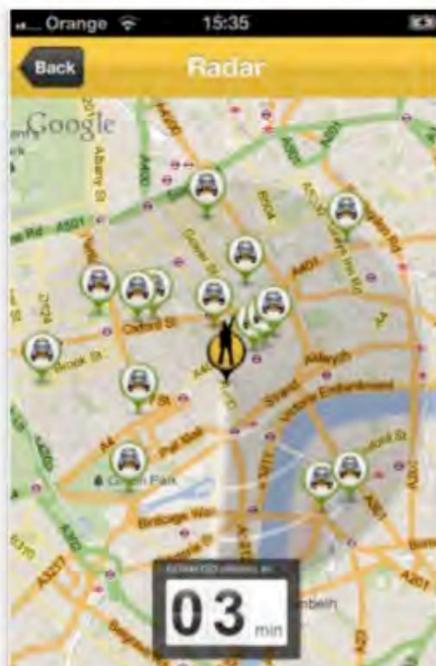
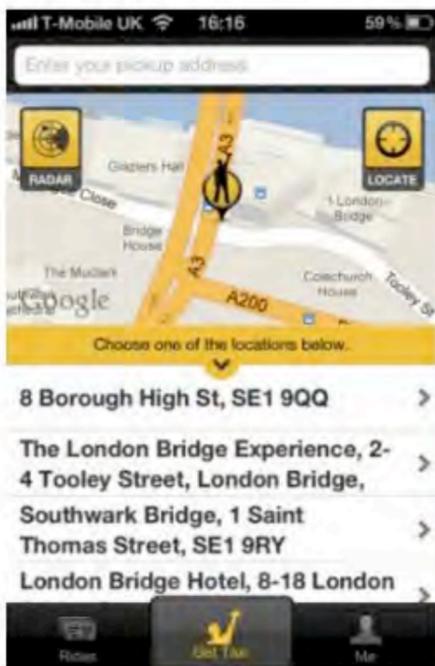
It's also worth noting that GetTaxi could be attempting to blindside Hailo by getting a foothold in **The City That Never Sleeps**. New York was the obvious contender for Hailo's first foray into North America, but it seems that regulations are rather tight there which is why it's opting to start off its North American operations in [Chicago first](#). Though Hailo co-founder Jay Bregman tells us that he has now fully re-located to NYC to manage its rollout there, and it has a team working towards a full launch there some time in the autumn.

This is in addition to our teams in Chicago, Toronto, Boston, and Dublin, which are all now fully staffed and barreling toward full launches before the end of the year.

Just thought you might want to update the article based on this new information – as I was born in NYC it has a special meaning for me to bring Hailo back

Founded in 2010 by entrepreneurs Shahar Waiser-Smirin and Roi More, GetTaxi went on to raise more than \$10m in funding before today's announcement, and its mobile apps – including [iOS](#), [Android](#) and [BlackBerry](#) – currently serve users in London, Moscow and 13 cities across Israel. It will also soon be launching in France, Italy, Germany and Spain.

The recent rollout of GetTaxi's new apps means that if you're not sure about your current location when booking a taxi, you have the choice of entering either your location using GPS or a well-known landmark, such as a café or restaurant nearby. And a new radar feature enables you to see where the taxis are in your vicinity too.



This latest investment round is primarily a follow-on cash injection by Len Blavatnik's Access Industries, a global industrial and investment firm which owns Warner Music, with participation by founders Waiser and More.

"This funding will enable us to provide the same remarkable service across the world's major metropolises: NYC, London and Moscow," says Waiser. "Already today, at peak times, there is a GetTaxi ride booked every second somewhere in the world. We believe consumers and businesses deserve the ability to book and pay for a taxi quickly and securely at the click of a button on their smartphone from anywhere. GetTaxi's vision is to change the industry in such a way that taxis will be affordable for everyone, and available in less than a minute. This will make GetTaxi the preferred choice for getting around the city."

GetTaxi's expansion into New York City follows [Uber's launch in the city](#) last May. This is a massive move for the startup, as it's one of the world's biggest markets for taxis. "New York City is taking big steps to improve ground transportation and GetTaxi is poised to help make this transformation a reality," adds Jing Wang Herman, CEO of GetTaxi USA. "Imagine, knowing you'll always be able to find a cab, no matter what part of the city you're in, and knowing exactly how long it will take to find you. We are excited to bring the GetTaxi revolution to the most iconic city for taxis in the world."

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"We are confident that the GetTaxi phenomenon will spread fast and wide and we plan to be available in all major taxi markets around the world," adds Waiser.

GetTaxi currently has 110 employees, 2,500 taxis running its tech and has notched up 400,000 downloads across all mobile platforms.

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GetTaxi Raises Capital in Race to New York Launch

\$



BY ERIN GRIFFITH
ON JUNE 6, 2012



It's a crowded market out there for taxi disrupters. There's Hailo. There's Uber. There's Taxi Magic, TaxiPal, TaxiSelect... They're solving the taxi problem. A giant market. Ripe for disruption. We get it.

GetTaxi is one with a slightly more ambitious twist on Uber or Hailo's model. Not long after **Hailo** scored its big, flashy round of venture capital to expand to New York, GetTaxi has raised its own to do the same. The company just secured \$20 million in follow-on funding from Access Industries. Israel-based GetTaxi had previously raised \$11 million.

Even in a crowded, capital-intensive space, GetTaxi founder Shahar Waiser likely had no problem raising money. He's got a pile of successes to his name, having founded five other companies including Loyalize, the social TV company which sold to FunctionX, and Vigoda.ru, the Russian Groupon.

GetTaxi's mode goes beyond matching drivers to riders. You could argue that Hailo and Uber are being realistic — the taxi industry is entrenched and will take some time to truly revolutionize (especially in New York).

But GetTaxi is all-in: The company handles the entire transaction, from the taxi request to the mobile payment. That requires deeper integration with drivers on the enterprise side, including individual hardware that the drivers connect to their windshield. And it requires messing with a taxi driver's money. GetTaxi is the only company that services both consumers and enterprises, Waiser says. And this might be a blessing and a curse.

New York is the holy grail for taxi apps. It's also the messiest, most entrenched regulatory hoop-filled market. Around 60 percent of New York adults use a taxi at least once a month. Waiser says that user adoption isn't the hard part: "What I like about mobile is that it's a truly democratic place," he says. "When you have a product and amazing, remarkable service, eventually people will use the best one. That's the only way we win."

Thus far, GetTaxi seems to be winning. Rides had totaled 200,000 by March; they've grown by 100 percent every month, Waiser says. The company has **rapidly expanded** its presence in Europe to London, Moscow and a number of Israeli cities for a total of 17 locations.

The hard part is driver adoption, especially difficult in New York. Hailo has tested its stateside app first in Chicago, aiming to enter New York in the coming months. Founder and CEO Jay Bregman **told us in March** that Hailo could launch in New York within a month, if the city wasn't so loaded with regulatory red tape.

Waiser echoes that sentiment: "I want to launch it tomorrow," he says, "but you have to prepare everything right before the launch, because you have to deliver." GetTaxi will launch commercial operations in New York in a few months, he says.

Waiser says he may work with the New York taxi dispatch as he did in Moscow. "We're not competing with them," he says. "Taxis get more income by getting more jobs."

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Serial Entrepreneur & GetTaxi Co-Founder's 'Loyalize' Acquired for \$5M



ROI CARTHY

Monday, February 20th, 2012

Comments



Loyalize, a social TV audience platform, has been acquired by **Function(X)** for \$5M in cash and stock. The company intends to integrate Loyalize into **Viggle**, a television loyalty product designed for iOS devices.

Loyalize was founded by serial-entrepreneur Shahar Smirin whose current flagship project is **GetTaxi**, which former TechCrunch Editor Sarah Lacy called '**Way Beyond Uber**'.

Smirin, along with his GetTaxi co-founder, Roi More, are also the founding duo of **Vigoda.ru**, a

major daily deal site in Russia and the Ukraine with expected revenues for 2012 in the range of \$200-250M.

Loyalize's white-label platform allowed audiences using mobile devices and connected TVs to engage with TV shows, sporting events, and political debates by way of games, polls, discussion and sharing. Viewers were awarded badges and loyalty points, redeemable for real rewards.

The company's customer roster included Yahoo and Viacom/MTV. Its platform was also utilized in this year's Superbowl & Grammy Awards.

Smirin believes Loyalize has found a perfect home as in his eyes FunctionX's strategy is to establish itself as a key social TV player. Worthy to note that FunctionX which has a **market cap of nearly \$1B** was founded by Bob Sillerman, owner of, wait for it—American Idol.





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Taxi app competition shifts into overdrive

Software developers compete to build the first smartphone app allowing riders to pay for—and even hail—a cab. Venture capitalists hope to cash in, but only one company is expected to win access to the \$2 billion highly regulated market.

By Matthew Flamm [Twitter](#)

June 6, 2012 12:11 p.m.

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The competition to transform the New York taxi cab experience is shifting into overdrive.

The race began in March, when the city's Taxi and Limousine Commission put out a request for proposals to develop an application that would allow passengers to pay fares with smart phones. More than a dozen tech companies showed up for the informational meeting, and have until June 14 to submit their ideas.

Among the competitors are Hailo and Get Taxi. The two developers are already competing in London, where Hailo says it has 4,500 registered users while Get Taxi's signed up 1,000.

"We are very driver-focused," said Jay Bregman, co-founder and chief executive of Hailo, which is based on a boat in the Thames, and which recently opened an office here in Chelsea. In March the company received \$17 million in new funding from Accel Partners to expand its operations.

GetTaxi, which is based in Tel Aviv, Israel with operations in Moscow and Israel as well as London, announced on Wednesday that it has secured \$20 million to support a New York City launch.

"We have an enterprise solution for businesses," said Jing Wang Herman, a JPMorgan Chase & Co. veteran who was recently named CEO of GetTaxi USA. Companies keep accounts directly with GetTaxi and employees never have to bother with payments or receipts, she explained.

The two-year-old company's financing comes from its original backers, Access Industries, a global industrial and investment firm run by Len Blavatnik, which owns Warner Music, and the company's founders, Shahar Waiser and Roi More. The investment brings GetTaxi's total financing to \$30 million.

Though the request for proposals process has been cause for grumbling among tech companies, some of whom would have preferred to let the free market pick the winner, New York is prized territory for any taxi-related business. Yellow cabs alone generate more than \$2 billion in annual revenue from fares. The winning company will make its money from transaction fees—a tiny fraction of the fare—charged to the driver.

In addition to letting passengers pay for a yellow cab ride with their phones, the winning app should also offer a host of other, seamlessly integrated services.

They include the ability of passengers to locate nearby available cabs or other for-hire vehicles, find other passengers for ride sharing, report lost property and provide feedback to the taxi commission. The app must be made available free to passengers and at no cost to the city.

Both GetTaxi and Hailo say their systems can do all that and more.

Ms. Herman, whose love of taxis led her to get a hack license, said GetTaxi allows users to hail different cabs, such as hybrids or wheelchair-accessible cars. The app can also be used in different languages, and offers live customer service around the clock.

Mr. Bregman said one of the references in its request for proposals will be from an advocate for the disabled in London who co-wrote an article praising the service.

The company is hoping to launch its system in yellow cabs and livery cars. It would also like the app to work with the city's green apple-colored outer borough cabs but that may not be an option: Last Friday a state judge issued a temporary restraining order stopping the city from issuing new borough taxi permits. The yellow taxi industry has argued the process of creating the new cabs was flawed.

The taxi commission expects to pick a winning smart phone app by November. The company will then have four months to get its system up and running.

Though the taxi commission will offer the winner an exclusive contract, both companies say they are planning on sticking around New York no matter what happens.

"There are many ways to launch in New York," Ms. Herman said.

Mr. Bregman seems to agree. "We're going to launch this service notwithstanding [what happens with the request for proposals]," he said. "In London, eight apps launched at the same time ours did, and some of



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Tech companies have until June 14 to submit their ideas for an application that would allow passengers to pay taxi fares with smart phones.

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6/6/12

NEWS
By MARC BEJA

This company wants you to hail and pay for a cab with your phone



Photo credit: Getty Images

By the end of the year, city commuters could be able to get -- and pay for -- a taxi with a few taps of a cellphone.

Smartphone app company GetTaxi, which is already being used by passengers in England, Russia and Israel, is announcing its plans today to bring the free service to New York over the next few months.

Jing Wang Herman, who has a taxi license and is heading the company's launch in the U.S., said she hopes to bring a "taxi revolution to New York." The app is being submitted this month to the Taxi and Limousine Commission, which is looking for a way to let riders pay their bill using a phone.

Herman said the service is like a digital dispatcher: people open the app, click to hail a nearby cab -- you can also request a handicap or hybrid car -- and then watch how far away it is on a map using GPS. Riders can also find friends or strangers to share -- and split -- the fare.

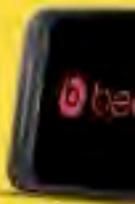
Current rules only allow yellow cabs to accept street hails, and liveries can offer prearranged calls. A plan to legalize street hails outside Manhattan was halted by a judge last week.

Herman said she expects cabbies to welcome the service, even though they have to pay the company a fee.

"If you can just have the ability to see around the corner and not miss that passenger, I think that makes all the difference in the world to drivers," she said.

A spokesman for the TLC said it would consider "anything that they thought was a new, innovative use of technology in taxi cabs," but said he could not comment on the company's proposal.





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By JENNIFER FERMINO Transit Reporter

Last Updated: 3:27 PM, June 6, 2012

Posted: 12:50 AM, June 6, 2012

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New Yorkers may soon be able to flag down yellow cabs without having to lift an arm.

The Taxi & Limousine Commission is considering several proposals for apps — already popular in other cities — that would allow riders to digitally hail taxis with their smartphones.

The programs, if approved by the TLC, could revolutionize how passengers use yellow cabs.

At least two software developers will respond to the city's request in March for a proposal to find ways for riders to pay by cellphone and to "find taxicabs available for service near their location."

Bad News For Your Insurer



New York - New rule allows many New York drivers to get car insurance for as low as \$9/week! [Learn more](#)

New York Insider Secret



Muscle builder leaves trainers speechless... [Learn more](#)

"It's what we call digital hailing," said Jing Wang Herman, CEO of GetTaxi USA, one of the companies that responded to the city's request.

GetTaxi's app — in use in the UK, Russia and Israel — just received \$20 million in funding from billionaire Len Blavatnik for its New York City launch.

GetTaxi provides cab drivers with an in-car system, similar to a GPS unit, that tracks their vehicle's movements.

When would-be riders press a button on the app on their smartphones, the system searches for a nearby available cab and alerts the driver. The cabbie can then accept the trip or decline it.

If the fare is accepted, the passenger can watch in real time on the phone as the cab makes its way through traffic toward the agreed-on pickup spot.

A GetTaxi competitor, Hailo — which is hugely popular in London — operates a similar system.

"[The TLC] understands this is the next phase coming from cabs," said Jay Bregman, the Hailo CEO.

TLC Deputy Commissioner Ashwini Chhabra said the agency is still deciding whether the apps would be approved for New York, since yellow cabs are currently prohibited from accepting any

pre-arranged pickups.

Those rules specifically ban the use of two-way radios by cab drivers for the purpose of scheduling trips with potential fares.

But the creators of GetTaxi and Hailo argue that no dispatch system or radio is necessary for riders using their phones to find cabs — they would link up via the app.

The new technology could also help cab riders who are disabled.

In cities where Hailo operates, disabled riders can use it to search specifically for wheelchair-accessible vehicles nearby.

"People are saying, 'App has changed my life,'" said Bregman.

New York City is currently being sued in federal court for not providing enough wheelchair-accessible cabs, a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

jennifer.fermino@nypost.com