

## THE STARTUP PAGE



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As a semi-professional dirt bike racer, Jerome Lacote of Victorise knows the need for split-second decisions in competition. He's developed a device to aid competitors in making some of those decisions.

## Co.'s Tech Competes for, And Along With, Customers

A semi-professional dirt bike racer is developing technology in Carlsbad that might give him the winning edge during competitions. It's a tech he thinks other competitive athletes would pay for.

The idea for the technology came to Jerome Lacote as he searched for ways to be better on the track.

"When you're in the middle of the race, there's a lot of emotion and commotion going on," Lacote said. "It can be hard to think clearly in the moment."

So Lacote developed a piece of hardware that can give alerts to athletes during a competition or in training, and launched a sports tech startup called Victorise Inc.

The hardware is basically a bluetooth-enabled light that can be attached inside helmets using a magnet. The light is paired with a smartphone app, where the user can determine when, why, and where to get alerts. For example, a user can preset an alert to drink water at specific intervals, or set warnings for when a track is about to get tough or when an upcoming turn might be dangerous.

### The Color Code

The company, which was founded in 2016, has a pretty straightforward prototype. The alerts are simply multicolored lights. Blue might mean "drink water" and a red light might mean "slow down." The user gets to assign meanings to the colors.

But Lacote said he has plans to build an analytics dashboard that will provide feedback and insights about a person's performance over time. For example, if athletes are averaging a certain speed over several sessions, the smart device

inside their helmets can send alerts if the user is uncommonly slow and needs to speed up (or vice versa).

"All racers are trying to do this math in their heads during a race, because you don't want to go too fast and burn yourself out," Lacote said. "You want a consistent pace. So our software does the math for you."

### Advantage Vs. Obtrusiveness

Lacote, who's spent the majority of his career as a user interface designer for the video game industry, has the chops to build a much "smarter" device in the future. He envisions a future product that leverages augmented reality to deliver these messages to the user. But he's also seen augmented reality go wrong.

"We've seen products fail in the past, and it's because there needs to be a balance between the value your product is offering and how obtrusive the technology is to the user," Lacote said.

He believes the reason Google Glass wasn't a hit with users, for example, was because it didn't offer enough functionality in exchange for the hassle. He said working for companies like Activision Publishing Inc., Disney, and Rockstar Games Inc. helped him learn the importance of user experience and why design often needs to be subtle.

"You need to make sure not to overwhelm the user," Lacote said.

This is part of the reason Victorise is starting small — with only a light — rather than words and images distracting the user. The other reason is because augmented reality technology is expensive to consumers, and

bluetooth-enabled lights are not.

The customers Victorise is targeting will likely not be able to afford a \$3,000 "smart helmet," Lacote said. But they can afford a simplified racing device. He expects the final product will go on the market for \$100-\$200.

### Affordability

Lacote's approach makes sense. While smart wearables are still new, paring down a product to its most affordable and basic version might encourage mass adoption. In the startup bible "Innovator's Dilemma," author Clayton M. Christensen explains that sustaining innovations are often not the best on the market, but the ones that balance affordability with functionality and value. That point was reiterated during the keynote address at last year's San Diego Startup Week by longtime venture capitalist Mark Suster.

Truly competitive newcomers, Suster said, have created subpar versions of products already on the market, but created them at a lower price, with lower functionality, and a lower profit margin.

It worked for Xiaomi Inc., the Chinese maker of one of the most simplified and affordable activity trackers on the market. The company holds its own against mega competitors Garmin Ltd. and FitBit Inc. because the wearable device only costs about \$35. This tactic also worked for action camera company GoPro Inc.

Will it work for Victorise? It's too early to say. The company is raising \$200,000 to \$500,000 for its seed round, which will prepare the company for commercial launch.



Photo courtesy of Jeff Ward

Jason Calacanis is known for keynoting tech industry conferences worldwide. Here, he speaks at the Future of Web Apps conference in Las Vegas.

## Super Angel to Share His Perspective At Startup Week

A bit of a celebrity in the startup world will be keynoting this year's San Diego Startup Week.

San Francisco angel investor Jason Calacanis has been booked to open the weeklong event.

"Jason is the most prominent angel in the tech world," said Neal Bloom, an organizer and board member of San Diego Startup Week. "He's the face of super angels."

Calacanis has invested in over 150 startups, including the first round that financed Uber Technologies Inc. He's also a longtime entrepreneur, having founded Weblogs Inc. (which sold to AOL Inc. in 2005). After three years of hosting the popular startup conference TechCrunch50, he founded the Launch Conference to spotlight unannounced startups. Previous Launch graduates include Mint, Dropbox Inc., Yammer, and FitBit Inc.

Bloom said Calacanis also has Southern California ties. He was a longtime entrepreneur in Los Angeles, and is an investor in San Diego startup Wrapify Inc.

During the keynote address at Startup Week, Calacanis is expected to share excerpts from his forthcoming book "Angel" (publishing July 18), which is about investing in technology startups. Bloom said the hope is Calacanis will attract a crowd of newbie angel investors to Startup Week.

Startup Week worked with angel investor group Tech Coast Angels to book Calacanis for the event. TCA's executive director, Ashok Kamal, said Calacanis was "a contact from a past life."

"San Diego is a premier startup city and Startup Week is our premier event, so it's only right we have the world's premier angel investor as our keynote," Kamal said via email. "Jason always keeps it real, pays it forward and puts founders first. We can all learn from him as we grow San Diego's entrepreneurial ecosystem."

Startup Week takes place June 19-23. It includes 15 tracks and over 150 events.

Photo courtesy of Neal Bloom  
Neal Bloom is a mega "connector" of San Diego's tech and startup community, serving on the boards of several startup-related nonprofits.



### The Sports & Active Lifestyle Industry In San Diego Accounts For...

**\$1.4 billion**

in economic activity  
(2015)

Source: San Diego Sport Innovators

**34,000 jobs**

(2015)

**1,200 companies**

(2014)

### Local Sports Tech & Training Equipment Cos. Include...

GoPro Inc.  
Skiz Inc.

American Wave  
Machines Inc.

Athlytix Inc.  
Hookit Inc.

Rock My World Inc.