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MINNE INNO

**STARTUPS TO WATCH**

These 20 fledgling companies are poised for big things in 2022.

BY CARTER JONES | PAGES 18-21

**T H E L I S T**  
**SHOPPING CENTERS**  
PAGE 22**EVENTS**  
Foo Fighters gig could have  
meant big bucks for U of M.  
**PATRICK REHKAMP, 2****FOOD & DRINK**  
Why Minnesota breweries are  
watching the price of cans.  
**BRIANNA KELLY, 6****REAL ESTATE**  
Meet our new beat reporter  
covering CRE and hospitality  
**KELLY BUSCHE, 8****MINNEAPOLIS/  
ST. PAUL  
BUSINESS JOURNAL**  
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2021 was a blockbuster year for the Twin Cities startup community.

There were a record number of IPOs, including those by Bright Health, Miromatrix and CVRx; blockbuster funding rounds, such as the \$150 million Series F by Arctic Wolf, and too many product launches, executive appointments and relocations to count.

Minne Inno has scoped out the scene and chosen the following list of 20 startups that are on the next wave of successful companies to emerge from the Twin Cities. Some of them have already raised millions, landed in competitive accelerators or are just finding their footing. But they're all making a stir.

1

### BETTOREDGE

BettorEdge launched in October 2020 and offers a legal sports-betting platform in over 45 states. Instead of setting its own odds, the site resembles a stock market, with bettors determining how much to wager with each other. This past summer, the Minneapolis-based company surpassed \$3.5 million in orders and brought on Andrew Abbott, global agency lead at Reddit, to serve on the company's adviser team.

▼ Greg Kajewski, left, and James Seils are founders of BettorEdge



2

### BLACK TECH TALENT

Michael Jackson founded Black Tech Talent in April 2020 to bridge the gap between Black workers and tech-sector jobs. The Farmington-based company's job board is used by employers including Target Corp., the Minnesota Twins and Pohlad Cos. Between the jobs board, podcast, a new app and events, the company projects to bring in \$1.5 million in revenue in 2022, Jackson told the Business Journal in October.

3

### BRIGHT PLANET PET

Bright Planet Pet was founded in July 2020 by Katherine Ellison and became the first plant-based dog treats on the market that taste and smell like meat. The treats create 90% less carbon emissions and use 68% less water than similar meat-based treats. For each bag sold, the firm makes a donation to The Eden Reforestation Project. The treats are available at PetValue, a retailer in Canada, and starting in February, they will be on the shelves at 500 Petco stores.

4

### CARBON ORIGINS

Carbon Origins Inc. got off the ground in California, but relocated to St. Paul in July after being selected for the Techstars Farm to Fork accelerator. The company is building a last-mile delivery robot that is controlled by a human using a virtual reality headset. The robot, dubbed Skippy, is already making deliveries around St. Paul and will soon expand to the University of Minnesota and Minneapolis' North Loop neighborhood, according to a Star Tribune report.

5

### GRIP MOLECULAR

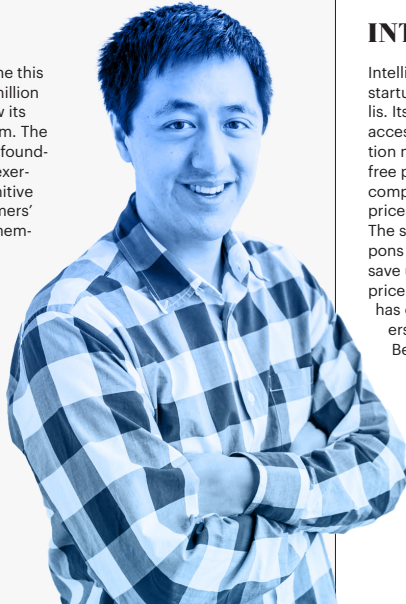
St. Paul-based Grip Molecular uses an electronic biosensor that can quickly and accurately detect certain diseases with technology that bypasses traditional chemistry-based tests. The company has completed proof-of-concept experiments and is now raising a Series A round of funding. Its first product will address upper respiratory diseases such as Covid-19 and influenza.

6

**GWOOP**

Gwoop Inc. hit the scene this fall after raising \$1.85 million in seed funding to grow its esports training platform. The Edina-based company, founded by Gavin Lee, uses exercises grounded in cognitive science to improve gamers' reaction times, visual memory and speed. Gwoop is building its brand through partnerships at over 1,000 high school esports teams, including at Wayzata, St. Louis Park and Edina.

► Gavin Lee is the co-founder and CEO of Gwoop.



7

**INTELLIGENTRX**

IntelligentRx is a digital health startup based in Minneapolis. Its mission is to increase access to affordable prescription medications by using a free platform that includes a comparison tool to compare prices at local pharmacies. The site also provides coupons and discounts that can save up to 85% of the retail price. The company currently has over 28,000 monthly users and was included in the Beta.MN fall 2021 cohort.

8

**KOM-UNITY**

Two years ago, Neil Gupta and Amal Sastry founded Kom-Unity when they were 12 years old. Now the pair have developed and launched a mobile app after a successful Kickstarter campaign raised over \$15,000. The app allows people to share or request items or services within their neighborhood, such as borrowing a neighbor's lawnmower for \$20. The company's advisers and mentors include Leon Logothetis, a motivational speaker and philanthropist, and Shaun Frankson, co-founder of the Plastic Bank.

9

**LEAGUEOS**

LeagueOS is prelaunch but will get a boost heading into next year as a participant of the Minnesota Twins Accelerator by Techstars. The Minneapolis-based company is a platform for sports and esports leagues to register and operate leagues. The current software-as-a-service iteration of the company is a pivot from its start as a software for managing and presenting drone racing.

10

**MARANI HEALTH**

Marani Health was co-founded at Mayo Clinic to improve the experience of new mothers and their babies. Last month, the Minneapolis-based company raised \$7.6 million to launch a digital prenatal and postpartum care platform that will combine a mobile app with a clinical portal. That recent round of funding is in addition to a previous \$3.7 million round the company raised in February.

► Ann Holder is Marani Health's CEO.



11

**NEXTGEM**

NextGem is the brainchild of Rob and Ryan Weber, serial entrepreneurs and founders of St. Cloud-based Great North Ventures. The site hasn't launched yet, but it's backed by a stable of local venture capital firms, including Groove Capital, and is being led by co-founder James DonFrancesco. The site will allow trading-card enthusiasts to show off their collections and trade rare cards amongst each other.

12

**NIRON MAGNETICS**

Minneapolis-based Niron Magnetics develops high-performance magnets, used in electric car drivetrains, that are free of rare-earth metals. Earlier this year, Niron announced a \$21 million round of funding that was led by Volvo Cars Tech Fund and Volta Energy Technologies.



13

**OURFAMILYWIZARD**

OurFamilyWizard received its first-ever outside investment from Boston-based Spectrum Equity. This investment, paired with new CEO Nick VanWagner (LinkedIn, When I Work) and the addition of new directors, has made the company grow faster than ever. The Minneapolis-based company's website and mobile app allows divorced couples to co-parent with tools such as shared calendars and expense tracking.

► Nick VanWagner is CEO of OurFamilyWizard

14

**PROSERVA**

Proserva is a training tool for K-12 teachers. The site measures teacher's performance in real-time, eliminating the inefficiency of workshops and broad training seminars and allowing for personalized development. The Minneapolis-based company was a 2021 finalist in Minnesota Cup's education and training category.

15

**SOLESAFE**

SoleSafe is an insurance platform for expensive and collectible sneakers. As the company gains traction through participating in the Minnesota Twins Accelerator by Techstars, founder and CEO Phil Terrill has plans to open a pre-seed round of fundraising next year.

► Phil Terrill is CEO of SoleSafe



16

**RIVER HEALTH**

River Health relocated from Dallas to Minneapolis after participating in the United-Healthcare accelerator and closed a \$3.1 million seed round led by Stella Health, the parent of Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. CEO Kobby Amoah described the company as a Netflix-style health care plan for young adults. For \$35 per month, River users receive access to unlimited virtual visits, in-person care at 1,200 partner clinics, \$5 prescriptions through a mail-order pharmacy, and low-cost lab tests. The service is now available in seven states including Minnesota, plus Washington, D.C.

17

**TEAMGENIUS**

TeamGenius, a Minneapolis-based company that provides youth-sports evaluation software, raised \$11 million in an oversubscribed seed round in August. The company's digital platform is used by over 500 organizations across 15 sports to help coaches manage tryouts and track player development. Last year, TeamGenius acquired xHockeyDevelopment, an at-home training app which it rebranded as Hockey Labs.

18

**TELO**

Telo is designing a fresh take on the rollator walker. The Telo walker is different than traditional walkers because it shifts the user's center of gravity and improves safety. The company was recently a runner-up in the student division of Minnesota Cup. Telo now expects to begin testing a metal prototype of its walker next spring.

19

**TERRACOH**

TerraCOH is a geothermal energy company that was spun out of the University of Minnesota. The company's propriety technology captures and stores carbon dioxide underground while also generating cheap and efficient energy for use above ground. The Bloomington-based company has been awarded over \$1.3 million in Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer grants from the Small Business Administration to further develop its technology.

20

**WE SPARKLE**

Michelle Tran Maryns founded We Sparkle Co. in 2019 to help women and minority entrepreneurs start and maintain their own companies. Minneapolis-based We Sparkle now makes an AI-powered social-enterprise platform for startup companies. Its platform provides entrepreneurs with everything from a website to host an online store to a virtual scheduler and assistant.

► Michelle Tran Maryns is founder of We Sparkle.

