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(Photo: Terrence Duffy)

## Startup of the Month: Japa

UC Davis grads smarten up parking lots

| BACK | WEB ONLY | JAN 10, 2019 | *By Russell Nichols* |

As part of an entrepreneurship course at UC Davis, Mathew Magno was instructed to come up with a problem to solve. He didn't think twice: Magno wanted to solve the nightmare that is finding a place to park.

"Being a student is horrible for parking," he says. "I'd be late for class or sometimes, by the time I found parking, class was over."

Magno launched the smart parking startup Japa in 2017 and, as CEO and cofounder of the Davis-based startup, he wants to help drivers steer clear of these headaches. Japa works by using wireless sensors placed on parking spaces. The sensors communicate through radio frequency to an antenna/base station, which sends the data to the internet and Japa's servers. Magno and cofounder and Chief Technology Officer Charles Chen, also a UC Davis alum, aggregate the data onto the mobile app and management platform. With a battery life of 7 to 10 years, each sensor can detect with 99 percent accuracy which spaces are open and send users directions to find them, Magno says.

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Japa also supports parking lot owners and management with a platform that shows that real-time analytics to determine violations, lot occupancy and other data. Reducing the amount of time drivers spend in search of parking also helps reduce carbon emissions, he says.

Other startups in this market focus on reserving spaces in private lots, Magno says, but don't provide real-time data to open spaces in public lots. To date, Japa has installed sensors at the UC Berkeley campus and on streets in Walnut Creek. An installation at the UC Davis Medical Center is in the works.

"Smart cities are coming, from smart streetlights to citywide wifi to smart trash cans," Magno says. "We already have smart parking meters where you can pay through an app. With Japa, we can take any third-party data, put it into one app and have the whole bird's eye view of the transportation industry in a futuristic way."

Dr. Benjamin Wang, CEO of medical device company Nevap, was a judge for the 2018 UC Davis Big Bang! Business Competition when he heard the Japa pitch. He liked the problem the team (two cofounders and a software engineer) were addressing, he says, but more than that, he was drawn to their drive.

"Basically, as students, they had gotten in front of decision-makers and were moving the process forward," says Wang, a primary investor. "That's a key to being an entrepreneur."

In the following months, Wang tracked their progress, watching the two cofounders network with city and university officials, create the Japa app and software platform, and physically install the sensors themselves. (Magno is also a cofounder and director of PLASMA, a campus accelerator program where he supports and mentors other startups in a 12-week cohort.)

Japa won $10,000 from the Big Bang! Competition. To date, the startup has raised $250,000 in its seed round with a goal of $500,000. Japa was also a finalist for the 2018 Sacramento Region Innovation Awards for the new Government & Civic category.

The original name for the startup was Park It. When the team wanted to change it, Magno thought of his computer science professor, who would always make up assignments with various fake companies with fake names such as "Just Another Car Company."

"We used this idea and came up with 'Just a Parking App' and then we realized that it's a great acronym," Magno says. "Japa also means a meditation to relieve stress. So 'Japa: Park Smart — Stress Less' was born."