

Startup makes Fresno return with restaurant analytics focus

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The Benchmark Intelligence team at the Boomtown technology accelerator in Boulder, Colorado. From left to right: Chief Technology Officer Kenneth Koontz, Chief Executive Officer Eric Santos, Chief Performance Officer Brandon Reid and Chief Operating Officer Jordan Skole. A new software company founded by Fresno State grads aims to provide better analytics for restaurant owners with multiple retail locations.

The startup recently graduated from the Boomtown technology accelerator in Boulder, Colorado and has been generating revenue since April.

“Our system helps restaurant and retail chains understand why certain locations perform better than others,” said Eric Santos, co-founder and CEO of Benchmark Intelligence.

“It’s usually either operations or environment, so we look at what variables are impacting performance.”

Santos started the company with fellow Fresno State alum Ken Koontz as well as Jordan Skole and Brandon Reid. The four are currently the only employees and attended the three-month accelerator program in order to flesh out their business idea and connect with industry mentors. The company has since relocated back to Fresno and is looking to build its client base.

Benchmark pulls information from all over social media and the Internet to develop data profiles for each location. The data is then compared to the restaurant’s financials in order to develop a more detailed understanding of its performance.

“Our system can even take into account local weather and see if that may be affecting performance at a certain location. Or we could use it to see if a big storm is coming and alert the owners that they may not need as many staff that day,” Santos said.

While the premise of collecting social media data to build a performance profile on a business is not entirely new, Santos said his company’s application of the data is unique.

Toby Krout, co-director of Boomtown Accelerator, agreed and said the organization chose to admit Benchmark because the company shows a lot of potential within the restaurant industry.

“There are a few players that exist within this space, but most are a legacy model, meaning this isn’t their first application for the data,” he said. “They’re not coming from this with the same service perspective.”

Santos credits the mentors at Boomtown with helping to connect Benchmark with some of its first accounts and said the company currently has two paying clients in Colorado.

“Since moving back to Fresno we’ve talked to local chains,” he said. “We have about 10 clients currently piloting the program and we’re just focusing on trying to get them to be paying clients.”

In addition to monitoring their own data, Benchmark users can also see their performance as compared to rival businesses located nearby.

“A lot of our customers like that because they can have a baseline of information for nearby competitors,” Santos said.

That level of data is becoming increasingly useful within the restaurant world, said Nate Gilbert, who handles franchise sales at Deli Delicious. The sandwich chain currently has 28 locations open, with another 31 stores signed and in development between Los Angeles and Sacramento.

While Deli Delicious does not use Benchmark Intelligence, Gilbert said he has heard from the company and thinks this kind of product is going to become more popular within the industry. Collecting so much data does have the potential to make some uncomfortable, but overall he said this sort of analytics technology seems to be here to stay.

“Ultimately, in the restaurant industry, media is changing and advertising is changing so this type of information is becoming really key,” he said. “Just the service of syncing all your online profiles is valuable to most companies. Each location has all its own sites on social media and it’s a challenge for any company to keep tabs on it all.”

The Benchmark team has worked on several startups in the past, but Santos said this is the first one they have committed to full-time and it already shows the most promise.

“The response has been good so far,” he said. “We were able to get paying customers quicker than we thought. Before, we thought we’d have to be a lot further along with our features.”

As a graduate of the Boomtown Accelerator, Benchmark has already received some initial funding but will spend the next few months raising more capital and expanding its analytics.

Eventually, the group plans to market their software directly to clients at the corporate level, and they are already in talks with a national Fortune 50 company. Santos said the software holds particular value for large-scale clients since many franchises don’t have access to individual franchisee analytics.

“There’s a lot of potential for this sort of operational tool,” he said. “We have started off in the restaurant industry but we’re also eventually hoping to look at the retail, hospitality and automotive industries.”

