

Iceland startup finds success with trivia app

March 6 2014, by Jenna Gottlieb

A small startup has taken the gaming world by storm, finding success with its QuizUp trivia app and spurning offers to abandon its remote Iceland headquarters in favor of California's Silicon Valley.

The company, Plain Vanilla, on Thursday launches the Android version of QuizUp, which already has 10 million users who have played more than 1 billion matches on their iPhones and iPads.

Founder and CEO Thor Fridriksson told the Associated Press he plans to keep the company based in Iceland in part to show what it is possible to achieve even after the country's horrendous economic problems.

"Iceland has had a tough time since the banking crisis," said Fridriksson. "I think if Plain Vanilla stays in Iceland, creates more jobs and shows other startups what's possible, that's a positive thing."

In the autumn of 2008, Iceland's three largest banks collapsed, sending its economy into a freefall with businesses shuttering, the currency depreciating and unemployment rising to unprecedented levels. The country is still recovering.

In this somber mood, Plain Vanilla's success stands out. It started with 7 employees and currently has 45, Fridriksson said.

Venture capitalists have poured more than \$30 million into the company, which seems to have found a niche in the extremely competitive app business.

What makes the trivia app stand out in a field crowded with tens of thousands of choices?

QuizUp players can choose among more than 400 categories that range from questions about sports to literature to pop culture. Some of the most popular categories include: Harry Potter, Celebrities, Spelling, and Disney.

"For me, it's two things," said Mike Wehner, the editor of The Unofficial Apple Weblog. "First, the ridiculous number of categories available means that there's going to be something that everyone is an expert in. For example, I don't watch a whole lot of TV, but of the shows I do watch, I know a LOT about them. So although I'd probably be really bad at a trivia game where general 'TV' was a category, I'm one of the best in the world at the Futurama category in QuizUp."

The real-time mobile application also allows users to play against other people, not computers. Players can connect with, and challenge friends through Facebook, or play against strangers, which sets the app apart from many other trivia games.

"It constantly pushes you forward by telling you who you're better than," said Wehner. "You answer a few questions about a topic and you don't make much progress, but if you answer a few dozen, you might be the best in your city. Keep going and you're the best in your state, country, and eventually the world. Once you get that first carrot, there's always another one dangling in front of you."

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