

Edible worms, pingpong bots: Startups find mecca in Shenzhen

May 19 2016, by By Kelvin Chan



In this Wednesday, April 20, 2016 photo, Gerard Rubio, CEO of London-based startup Kniterate, works on a prototype for an automated knitting machine his company is developing at the Hax hardware startup "accelerator" in Shenzhen, China. Hax, backed by venture capital fund SOSV, brings startups from all over the world to the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, the world's electronics manufacturing capital, which allows them to speed up their research and development. (AP Photo/Kelvin Chan)

Shenzhen is the [world's electronics manufacturing capital](#), so what better place to be for entrepreneurs with ideas they want to turn into actual devices?

That's what the founders of Hax thought when they set up their "[accelerator](#)" for hardware startups five years ago in the southern Chinese city. Backed by [venture capital](#), Hax brings groups of startups to Shenzhen and introduces them to the countless component suppliers and [factories](#) in and around the city to speed up [prototype development](#).

"We've got a saying here that a week in Shenzhen is like a month anywhere else," said Hax partner Duncan Turner. "Teams come here for three and half months and basically get a year's worth of R&D done, which really sets them ahead."

Hax's latest class unveiled their prototypes this week to investors in Silicon Valley and online through Kickstarter campaigns to seek funding for manufacturing. Here are some current and recent examples:

ROBO PONG

Pingpong enthusiasts Harrison and Alexander Chen's table-tennis-training machine, Trainerbot, is about the size of a large pineapple and can be programmed via smartphone to fire balls at specific areas and give them certain spins. The brothers, raised in Taiwan, managed to build two prototypes a week in Shenzhen, thanks to the city's vast electronics markets and 3D printing services.



In this Wednesday, April 20, 2016 photo, Katharina Unger, left, and Julia Kaisinger, co-founders of startup Livin Farms, pose next to a prototype of the desktop insect hive that they're developing at the Hax hardware "accelerator", which will allow people to grow mealworms at home for food in Shenzhen, China. Hax, backed by venture capital fund SOSV, brings hardware startups from all over the world to the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, the world's electronics manufacturing capital, which allows them to speed up their research and development. (AP Photo/Kelvin Chan)

READY TO WEAR

Kniterate CEO Gerard Rubio's automated knitting machine can make accessories like scarves, socks or beanies. "This is basically a 3D printer for clothes," he says. Users download a template onto a tablet device,

load an image for a pattern and fit spools of yarn. Rubio, of Spain, says in Shenzhen he and his team were able to "go very fast and spend not much money on development."



In this Thursday, April 21, 2016 photo, Harrison Chen plays ping pong with the robotic table tennis trainer prototype in Shenzhen, China. Chen and his brother, Alexander, are developing at their startup, Trainerbot, at the Hax hardware "accelerator." Hax, backed by venture capital fund SOSV, brings hardware startups from all over the world to the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen, the world's electronics manufacturing capital, which allows them to speed up their research and development. (AP Photo/Kelvin Chan)

REMOTE ROVER

Swiss startup Rovenso's remotely operated rover is meant for use in disaster areas inaccessible due to contamination and rough terrain.

Roveo weighs 300 kilograms (660 pounds) and is up to 2 meters (6 feet) long, with four wheels whose innovative linkage system allows it to climb over tall obstacles while carrying heavy loads.

BUGGED

Grow your own insects at home with a desktop hive, and then eat them. Livin Farms' Austrian founder Katharina Unger says mealworms are a healthy, sustainable alternative to modern, industrialized food production, delicious roasted and salted, as a minced meat substitute or ground into flour for bread or tortillas. The company topped its \$100,000 crowdfunding goal by half after a Hax session last autumn. Unger says being based in Shenzhen enables the company to ensure its factory subcontractor treats staff well and manufactures sustainably.



In this Thursday, April 22, 2016 photo, a woman tends to her stall selling cables, connectors and other accessories at the Seg electronics market in the Huaqiangbei neighborhood in Shenzhen, China. The southern Chinese city has become a mecca for global hardware startups, many of whom come over with Hax, a startup "accelerator" backed by venture capital fund SOSV that introduces them to the countless component suppliers and factories in and around the city to speed up prototype development. (AP Photo/Kelvin Chan)

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