INNOVATION IN A BIND
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WHO WILL LEAD THE FUTURE OF KC?
THREE NAMES TO WATCH

R A D E | E C C L E S
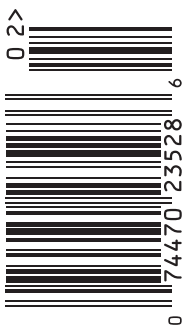APP STARTUP ENDURES AND THRIVES

KC BUSINESS

RACHEL SEXTON **+**

28

RISING STARS

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The Future is Here

Companies and individuals have proven time and again that our business community is in good hands

The future is bright for Kansas City, and we feature 29-plus reasons why in the pages that follow. Our annual class of Rising Stars (p. 21) covers the wide range of industries that support KC, from startups to law and retail to architecture. Every story is unique, and you'll soon read what sets them apart and why you should follow their progress in the coming years.

In fact, we have devoted the majority of this issue to the future of KC. As important as Rising Stars are those who have been doing business for decades but continue to evolve and make bold moves. They're the ones just a few rungs from the top of the ladder who aren't far from making it there. Their insight into the present and future of the city is invaluable, and we sit down with three of them: Jim Ritchie at Redstone Logistics, Kevin McGinnis at Sprint and Mike Nill at Cerner (p. 30).

When it comes to our future, so much of it will be shaped by the entrepreneurs, of small business and large, who take chances to build their businesses here, create job growth and bolster the region. There are endless examples out there, and many of our biggest companies began as small operations with big ideas.

We've found a true entrepreneurship story in Rade | Eccles (p. 18). The iOS app development and consulting firm began as two acquaintances who realized their skills complemented each other unbelievably well. That evolved into tireless effort from both to work long days and nights at home with no assurances that business and revenue would come in. They gave away their services for free at first to build their name, one of them living below the poverty level, and now they're roaring full-speed ahead with a bevy of clients.

Hard workers like those behind Rade | Eccles, those in our class of Rising Stars and the next group of innovative leaders have helped us frame KC success. We can't wait to see where we'll go from here!

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Not for the Faint of Heart

App development duo goes all in and lives to tell the tale

STORY BY **FRED BAUTERS** | PHOTOS BY **JOSHUA DAVIS**

Long days and long nights are central to almost every entrepreneur's success story. Other hobbies and free time fall by the wayside. Relationships are tested. These are components understood and documented time and again.

What's often left out is just how much good fortune is required—particularly in finding the right team members. Timing in the marketplace is everything for a startup, or any business, but the captains steering the ship either chart a smooth course or sink the ship entirely.

Rade | Eccles, an iOS app development firm in Overland Park, set sail after a chance encounter at a birthday party in 2009. Jeremy Eccles, CEO and vice president of design, and Shaun Williams, CEO and vice president of software engineering, were introduced to each other by a mutual friend and left to make small talk in the kitchen. "I thought, 'How long will it take to gracefully exit this conversation?'" Eccles says. "Then Shaun says, 'I'm looking to get into iPhone apps, and I need a graphics guy.' It wasn't long before we got lunch and decided we could start."

Today, the two of them have created a company with several full-time employees and an ever-growing list of clients and successful apps. But it took three years of gut checks and devotion to the vision, and that was just after they met, to get where they are today.

> "Everyone and their kid are building mobile apps. All of the weak hands got shaken out in the early days of the Web, and it will happen again. We take over a lot of failed projects. We're not that expensive, but we're very professional. We come at it from the end-user perspective.
>
> — *Jeremy Eccles*

They each put in $200 initially for LLC fees, Apple licensing and other costs. Williams continued his work as an SAP consultant and worked on the new venture from hotel rooms and on weekends. Eccles went all in after talking with his wife, a successful graphic designer. She decided she wanted to be home with their three kids and that they would do all they could to make Rade | Eccles a reality.

Eccles and Williams worked on some high-profile apps such as Gizmodo, Lifehacker and FAILApp, all with the intention of getting as much exposure as possible, while figuring out the logistics of a company with no office. "The first year was essentially to get some experience," Williams says. "Learn how to work with each other. How can we work remotely? What tools did we need? I'm a firm believer that you should be able to do whatever you need to do from anywhere."

Most of the projects they pursued early on were done for free to build a portfolio to showcase later. They had the combined experience and complementary skill sets, but they weren't bringing in much new business, as they continued to hit hurdles, typically in the form of businesses reluctant to make the jump into mobile.

So they created their own projects. They identified potential apps in the marketplace, built them out, put them up in the Apple App Store and contacted the companies for which they'd built the app to let them know what they had been working on and ask for feedback.

It was a nice gesture that sometimes ruffled feathers with companies that wanted to stick with mobile Web instead of apps. Cease-and-desist letters were issued amid all of the misunderstanding, with the result being a hit on the momentum Rade | Eccles was creating—Lifehacker

had made the Store's front page—and an end to what little income those apps brought in from ads.

Near the end of 2010, Eccles hit bottom, and the initial $10,000 he had set aside for the company had dried up. Finances got tighter and tighter until he had to apply for unemployment and look for a job, but his wife backed him the entire way. "We'd sit down [to talk about it], and the stress of it was overwhelming," Eccles says. "Unemployment ran out, but if she gets a job, how can I keep doing 60-80 hours a week on this company? We decided to keep going."

Williams wasn't in the same dire financial situation, or anything close to it, with his continuing work as an SAP consultant. But he wanted to help, despite both of the partners feeling strongly about a capitalist discipline. "I appreciated the fact that he put himself in a situation I couldn't handle," Williams says.

He gave Eccles $1,000 to remain on course, and their good faith in each other was rewarded again when Eccles was called to his church by his pastor. A member of the church gave him $1,000 anonymously. It was a sign to Eccles and Williams that they had to keep going.

They held firm, largely because they knew just how good of a fit they were as co-founders and that the market was ripe for their combined expertise. Williams saw early on that the competition "don't have this pairing," he says. "They don't have the ability to take something complex from the business perspective and bring the Apple methodology and simplicity."

Williams started developing software when he was 10 and sold his first program when he was 12, called the PC Kitchen. He had never owned a Mac but bought an iPhone and Macbook when the iPhone launched in order to learn all the coding language. "I knew, this is going to change everything," Williams says. "And not from the consumer perspective, but from the business side."

Williams and Eccles knew that they had everything lined up for success. They were running annual and semi-annual meetings as if they were a major corporation and were organized to succeed. It came down to securing a few paying clients.

Thom Hartmann, the No. 1 progressive radio talk show host in the nation, was the first big get and a testament to Williams and Eccles' dedication. Eccles had called Hartmann every Saturday for six months to convince him to buy in, and Hartmann finally bit.

Then, their precious metal calculator app, Pennyweight, began to bring in consistent revenue—they've heard stories of people running entire businesses off the app. Now, they're working with Hallmark, and it's all come together.

They broke their bootstrapping motto ever so briefly to get a loan for office space and brought someone on to handle customer support. Piece by piece, they hired several others to grow the brand and market and sell Rade | Eccles, focusing on filling roles that occupied far too much of their time.

"The fun part of being a small startup is you can innovate," Eccles says. "Let's solve this problem, now let's solve that problem." The room for growth is endless, as consumers and businesses have just begun to understand the possibilities.

"We've moved from our mobile phones being a diversion to being a tool," Eccles says. "It's becoming increasingly to the point where I ask myself, 'What would I do without this device?' It's not just here to entertain me when I've got five minutes at a bus stop or before a meeting. It's something I rely on now."

What's clear is that apps aren't going anywhere and that Rade | Eccles plans to shift with the currents. Eccles and Williams already are preparing to focus in on the business solutions apps can provide.

"I think apps are here," Williams says. "I think the question now is, 'What do you do with apps?' [So far], Apple has driven a consumer, entertainment focus. But a few years from now, businesses will be using apps for employees to streamline and improve the efficiency of their job." **KCB**

WHAT GETS YOU UP IN THE MORNING? ▶

• I used to get up for the excitement of the next app we were building or one we just released to the store. Now, I have an office full of people. I have a responsibility to be here and run the show, but I really like it. —*Jeremy Eccles*

• It hasn't changed for me since I was 10. I get up every day for software. It's the best of everything. I can create something totally from scratch. I'm not a manual labor kind of guy. I can't go build a house, swing a hammer. But I can write some code. That's my outlet. It's not just the coding. It's the design process. It's the solving of the problems that come up while you're developing and the quality assurance. It's everything related to the development of the software product. —*Shaun Williams*