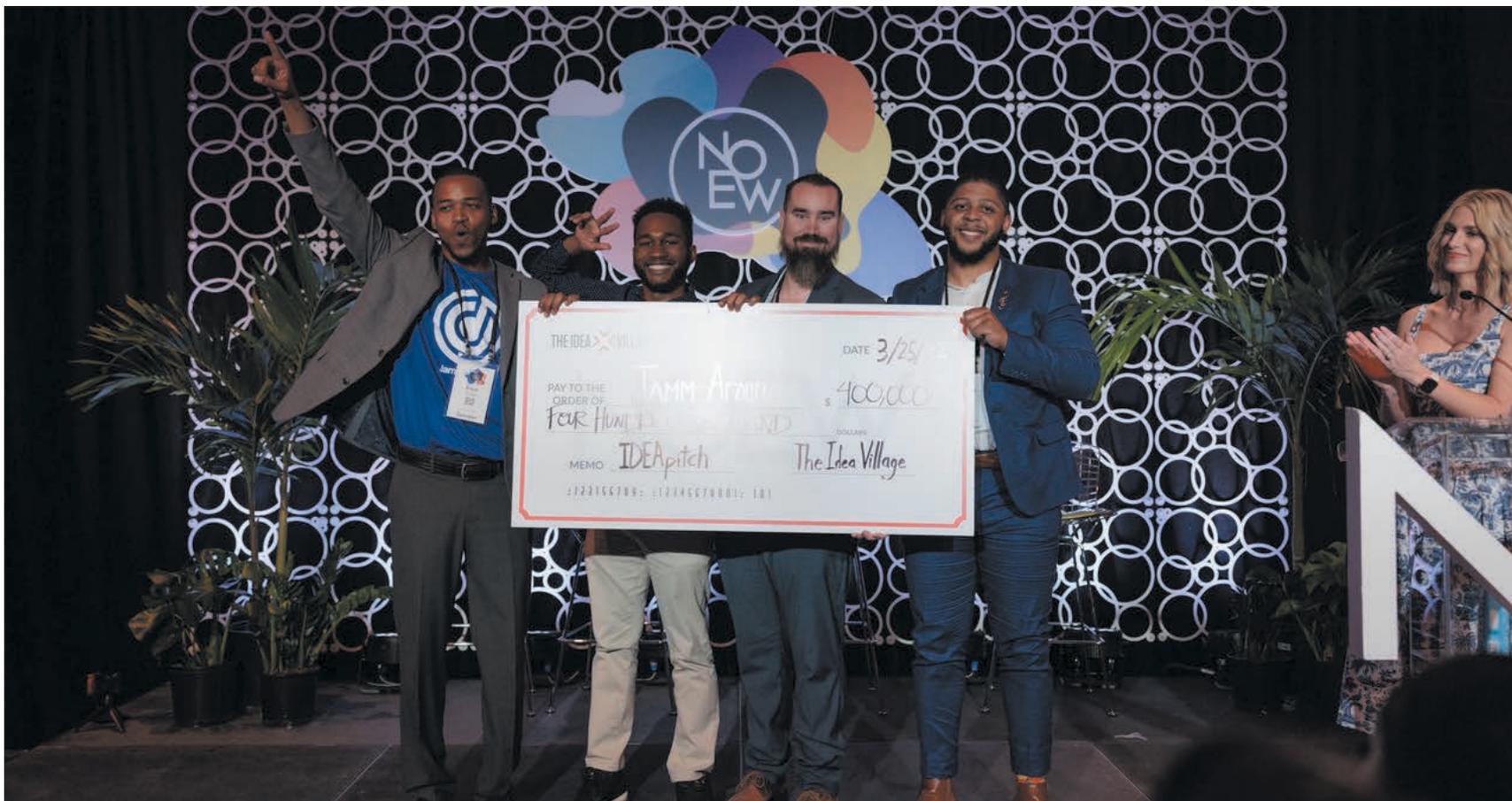


Startup Closeup: Jamm Around



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After landing distribution rights with EMPIRE Distribution, New Orleans native Brent Craig and his fraternity brother Marlon Butler in 2020 started creating an album through their independent record label. But they ran into more challenges than they initially expected.

“We were tasked with assembling engineers, producers, rappers and singers in order to make this album,” Craig said. “But we had such a hard time .. that the album was unsuccessful.”

That was around the same time that their friend Donovan Williams became skilled in creating apps. By the end of that year, the three formed Jamm Around, a networking app that allows musicians and others in the industry to make faster connections through free or paid subscriptions.

A few weeks ago, Jamm Around won the top prize at IDEApitch, the culminating event of New Orleans Entrepreneur Week. It made the founders eligible for a \$400,000 investment, which would be their largest to date. Jamm Around also was the only Black-owned startup out of 12 companies in The Idea Village’s VillageX growth accelerator program this year, which produced the startups competing in IDEApitch.

“Jamm Around is a special company that represents the tremendous potential of what can be built in New Orleans,” said Jon Atkinson, CEO of The Idea Village. “Built for creators by creators, the company is redefining how musi-

cians, globally, connect and collaborate.”

Pitch: When it comes to the music supply chain, the main issue that Craig said he came across was at the composition stage of the process. Whether production, distribution or delivery, each stage has different apps that compete to give musicians the best chance of an organized experience. However, the music composition stage requires multiple apps, something Jamm Around seeks to remedy.

“What we’re essentially doing is streamlining the music composition process .. everything that is needed in the composition process, which is discovering artists, file sharing, messaging, composing tools like creating your lyrics and melodies, we’re putting into Jamm Around,” Craig said.

Traction: Jamm Around went through an initial testing phase that included 700 users. They now track its usage and have found that an average of 13 people use the app daily. In the future, Jamm Around hopes to incorporate features such as in-app notifications to encourage users to return and provide more accurate data.

“Out of the 700 users [during the testing phase], we had 13,000 swipes. Every user has sent out about four requests on average,” Craig said. “So they’re using it, but we haven’t gotten to the point where we’re tracking that daily active user, which is really we’re trying to do now that we got this going after [the IDEApitch] competition.”

Funding/Investment: The funding for the app initially came from the three co-founders’ own pockets, which they said gave them hands-on experience with building the company and the ability to scale it. Since the app is

in such an early stage, the \$400,000 investment from the IDEApitch is their first official funding. The co-founders are now looking to family, friends and members of the community to invest in the company before moving on to other investment ventures. Also, they have begun building their advisory board with help from The Idea Village, the producer of NOEW.

“When we first went into The Idea Village’s VillageX accelerator program, we didn’t have anything but a product with users, and that was enough for them,” Craig said about nonprofit’s help while trying to grow Jamm Around.

Marketing: Since the app is still in its beta version, it is available for free download in the Apple app store or Androids at www.jammaround.com. Newtral Groundz, a digital media company founded by Craig, has been a vital part of spreading the word about Jamm Around. They also have delved into a few paid advertisements that test formats best suited to the company’s needs.

Competition: An Australian-based company called Vampr started a similar app in 2016. However, Craig said that Jamm Around differs due to Jamm Around’s connection to the hip-hop market. Also, the target audience of Jamm Around is solely music creators, as opposed to Vampr opening its services to other professions.

Challenges: Craig said finding investment has been difficult at times. The company previously reached out to six different investors and was rejected by Google for Startups: Black Founders Fund, he said.

“I want people to understand that you don’t need tens of thousands of dollars; we built the app for \$5,000,” he said.