

# PACK IT IN

## Startup Pakity Taps Into The Hiking Market

by PORCSHE N. MORAN



KIM STADING

**K**im Stading was planning a hiking trip for her birthday when she came up with a business idea. The St. Louis native talked to friends and searched multiple websites to figure out what gear she needed, but she knew there had to be a more efficient way to get ready. Her search prompted her to found Pakity, a Web-based company that prepares custom kits of lightweight, easy-to-use supplies for inexperienced hikers and backpackers.

“I wanted a pre-packed backpack because I didn’t know what I needed for the hike,” says the 23-year-old entrepreneur. “I couldn’t find a company that offered them, so I decided that I needed to create it.”

In 2014, Stading was the content developer for EquipmentShare, which took first place at that year’s Columbia Startup Weekend. She decided to return to the event in September 2015 to pitch her new concept. Pakity competed against 37 other businesses to earn an honorable mention.

“We received a lot of positive feedback from judges, volunteer mentors and other participants,” she says. “I wasn’t expecting anyone to actually be interested in the business. The feedback was what encouraged me to take Pakity from simply a weekend idea to a company.”

The journey from idea to full-fledged company hasn’t been simple for Stading. She says she didn’t know much about hiking before she started Pakity. Her initial lack of knowledge about the outdoor recreation industry forced her to turn down investors.

PHOTO BY L.G. PATTERSON

## The Name Game

Kim Stading jokes that her company's unusual name comes from a lack of sleep and a lot of coffee during a marathon brainstorming session at Columbia Startup Weekend 2015.

"The name is a collaboration between the members of the Startup Weekend team," she explains. "We were all just throwing out bizarre words that had anything to do with backpacking, hiking, etcetera. We landed on Pakity."

"I have done a lot of research through blogs, speaking with experienced hikers, and researching gear and recommendations," she says. "The learning curve has been huge. I have no problem admitting that I am not an expert. I rely on the experts for help."

After Startup Weekend, Stading joined the Regional Economic Development Inc. Innovation Hub. The organization provides business counseling, programming and co-working space for entrepreneurs in Columbia and Boone County.

"There are more entrepreneurs in Columbia than people realize," Stading says. "There are a lot of resources you can find. Whenever I have a question, there are at least six people I can ask. We help each other within the entrepreneur community by trading our professional skills and talents."

To move Pakity forward, Stading enlisted four others to work on the project. She gave each a vested equity in the company. The team's first task was market testing to get feedback from consumers. They soon realized their original business model focused mostly on novice hikers, and didn't have enough potential for returning customers.

"We had to pivot and figure out a demand to also serve more experienced hikers without changing the original concept too much," Stading says. "There are millions of ways to pivot the idea, but we wanted to make sure that we stayed true to what everyone was so excited about in the beginning. We need a viable minimal product to get us going before we can be everything to everyone."



ILLUSTRATION BY JOE WANER





the collaboration is done via technology. I have a lot of support from my friends. Being part of the REDI community really helps, too.”

The Pakity website went live in January, offering customized, pre-packed backpacks for two types of hiking trips: one to three days and three to 10 days. The custom-packed backpacks are created after the customer places the individual order.

“Each and every pack is different,” Stading says. “They are custom based on the hiker’s needs or group’s needs.”

The team continues to tweak the website at [www.pakity.com](http://www.pakity.com) to make it as user-friendly and interactive as possible. One example is the company blog, which gives an inside look at the items expert hikers pack for their excursions. Social media — Facebook, Twitter and Instagram — is the primary means of marketing. Stading says, in the future, Pakity might place advertisements in hiking magazines. The company’s short-term goals include networking, assembling a variety of sample packs for a second round of consumer testing, analyzing shipping options and seeking investors.

“Every day is different when you are in business,” Stading says. “I am an avid believer in learning nonstop. I am constantly reading, asking questions, going to events and watching TED Talks. “You can have a plan, but you might hit a roadblock, and then you have to figure out how to adapt.” **CEO**

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