

Publication: Vulcan Post

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Headline: Since you are already seeing ads, Sqkii wants to pay you hard cold cash for it

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By Jacky · On March 6, 2014



Every single day, we are bombarded with advertisements in various forms. From flyers to Facebook ads, marketers try their very best to put their brands in front of us everyday. When Kenny was serving as the Business Manager of Nanyang Technological University Accountancy and Business Club last year, he had first hand experience of this: advertisers are constantly seeking for opportunities to promote their brand.

“The question was always about how we could get consumers (or students) to look at advertisements.”

In October 2012, Kenny was introduced to Phewtick, a mobile application which helps you meet new people and actually rewards you with hard cold cash for doing it. Almost everyone that he knew from NTU was actively using Phewtick.

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Then it struck him, “Why don’t we come out with an application that rewards people with hard cold cash by viewing advertisement? Advertisers are always finding ways to get people to look at their advertisements?”

That was how the idea of Sqkii came about. Sqkii is a mobile web application that rewards users with cold hard cash for looking at sales promotional advertisements (a.k.a. squibs) that they find useful. A user would typically log into the web application to look at the latest discounts or giveaways from food or fashion retailers.



Users are awarded random amount ranging from \$0.0001 to \$10 worth of credit points each time they look at a squib for 10 seconds or more. These credit points can be cashed out via Paypal once a user accumulates \$10 worth of points.

Vulcan Post spoke to the team behind Sqkii about the whole vision and what they want to achieve:

So tell us how the name “Sqkii” came about.

We knew that advertising can be very expensive and small firms may not be able to afford that kind of money. This perhaps explains why as consumers, we are usually exposed

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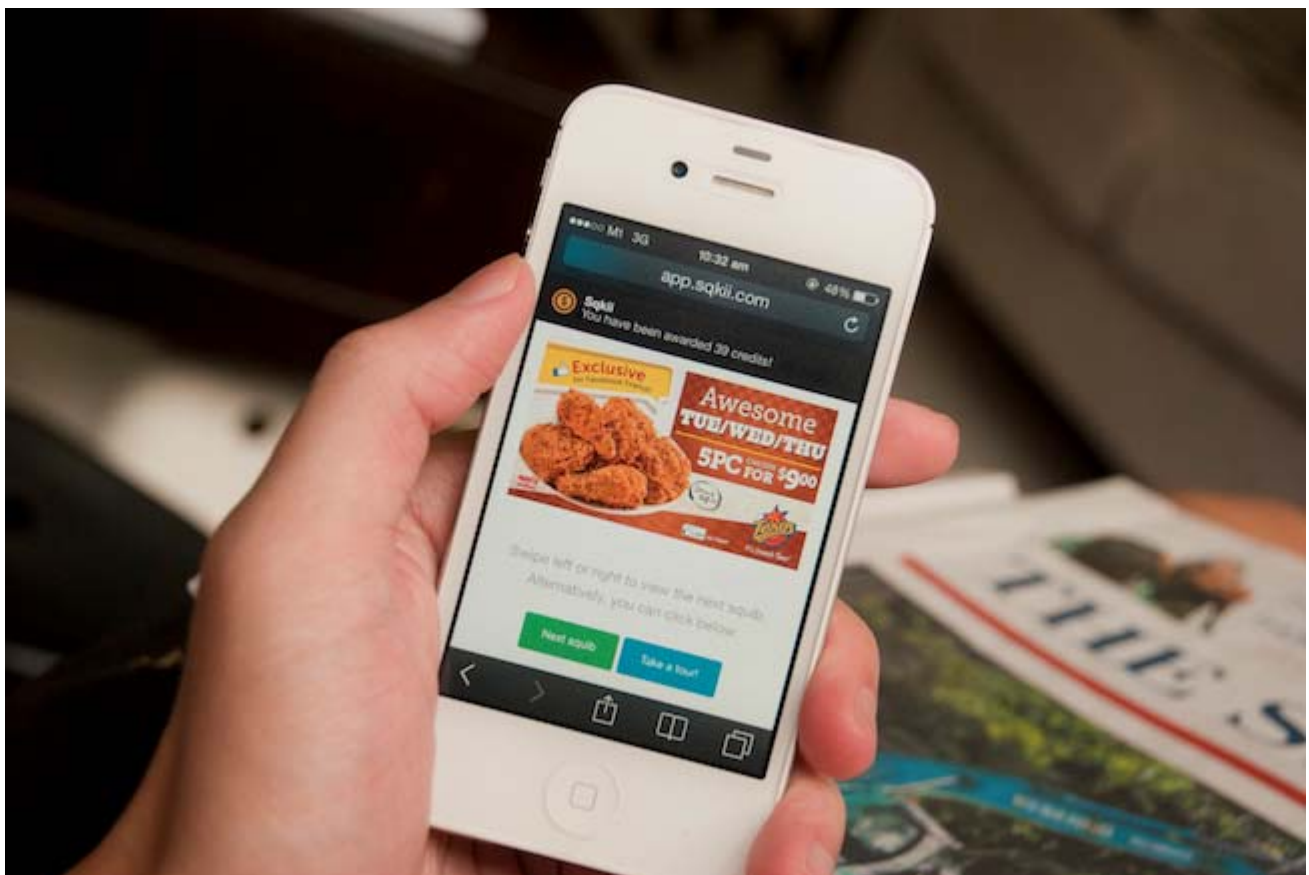
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to advertisements from bigger and more renowned brands; because they have pockets deep enough to afford this highly expensive tool.

Knowing that, our team imagined a world where prime advertising can be afforded by anyone. We made it our vision to create a level-playing field for advertisers, a platform where the small players can stand toe to toe with the big boys.

There is a common folk belief that elephants are afraid of mice. So we thought we would like to be the mouse that can potentially pick up a fair fight with the big elephants. Guess what, a mouse squeaks. So we call ourselves Sqkii (pronounced 'Squeak-ki').



How many partners and users do you have now?

We have only recently launched our beta to 500 specially selected users who are technologically and “promotionally” savvy. To access our exclusive beta, a user would need to receive an invitation codes from Sqkii.

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On the advertiser front, Sqkii is currently in talks with over 50 brands who are interested in its advertising programme. Some of these brands include Cedele, Strictly Pancakes, For Flea Sake, just to name a few. The firm is constantly seeking out for more advertisers to try out the advertising platform for free during this beta period.

Our involvement with advertisers does not stop after clients have engaged our services, we will continue to sit down with them to analyse the effectiveness of their campaign and examine how we can refine our application to help them meet their objectives.



There are a lot of mobile loyalty app and platforms which reward you with discounts and freebies, what do you think makes Sqkii stands out?

I think it is Sqkii's unique combination of random cash incentive and relevant advertisements that truly differentiates us from the rest. One cannot exist without the other. The random cash incentive is a mechanism that excites and inspires users to perform the simple act of viewing advertisement. It is thrilling because a user wouldn't know how much they would receive from performing that simple act; it can range from \$0.0001 to \$10!

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We also think we promote relevant advertising to our users.

There needs to be more than just thrill or money that inspires users to look at advertisements. If the advertisements that users are looking at are of no value to them, they would gradually lose interest.

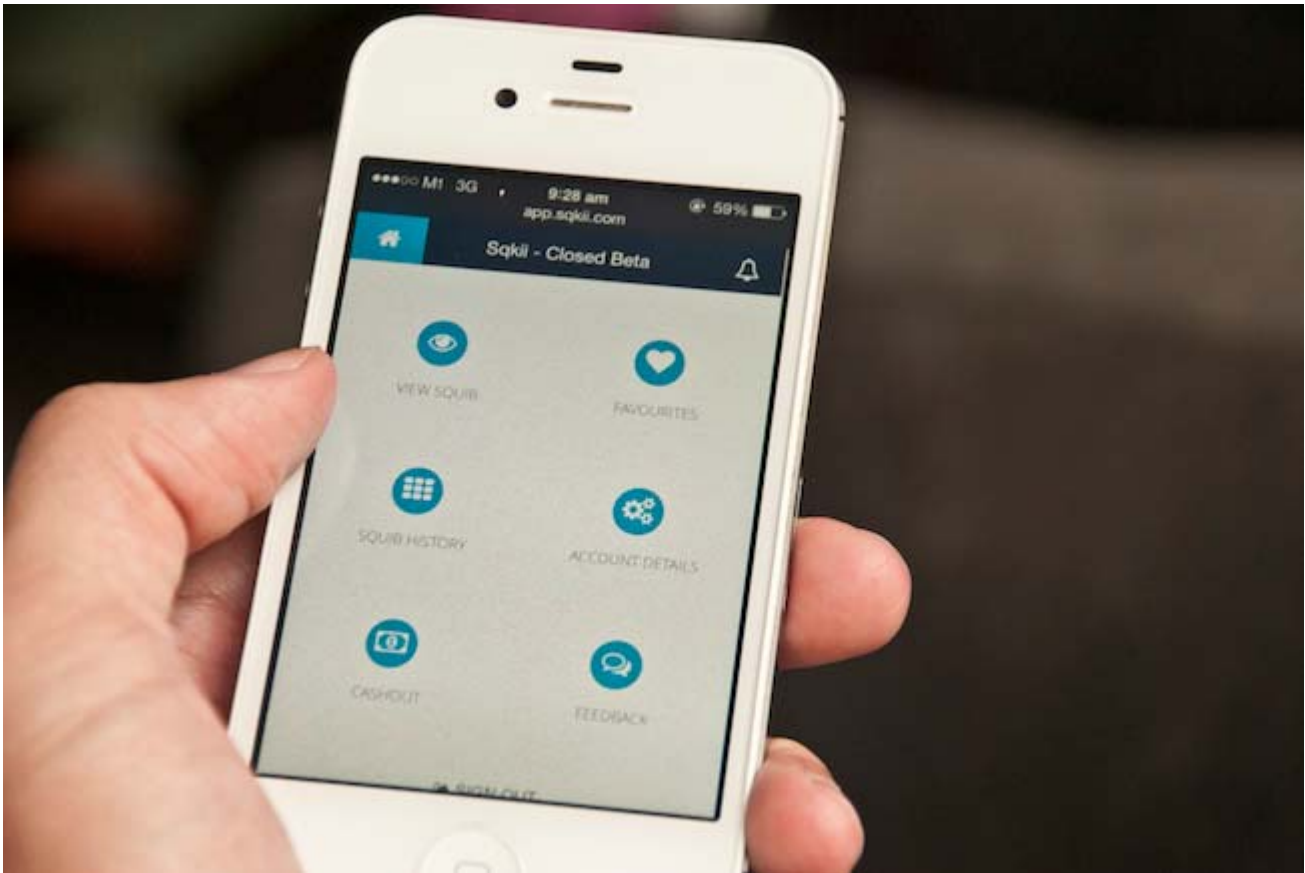
So in Sqkii, we emphasises a lot on useful content. The yardstick really is, whether as a true-blue Singaporean, “would this sales promotional advertisement be useful to me?” If the answer to that question is no, it wouldn’t appear on Sqkii.

To make it even more valuable, the application is programmed such that users only receive advertisements that they find useful. As a user interacts with the application, his usage pattern is parsed into strands of interest. After which, these strands personify the user’s likes and dislikes, allowing the application to filter away information that does not seem useful to the user. With that, Sqkii is able to display useful and relevant content to our users. In its subsequent versions, the application will be equipped with categorisation and GPS-enabled technologies. The grand vision is to bring the nearest and most relevant sales promotional advertisements to users in a fun and thrilling way. So for example, a user who is heading towards Bugis Street for lunch would be able to find relevant promotions on foods that are available at Bugis Street, via application.

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Tell us more about the team: how did you meet and why did you started this?

Sqkii was founded back in November 2012 by Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Accountancy undergraduate Kenny Choy, NBS Marketing undergraduate Marcus Ng and Singapore Management University (SMU) Information System Management undergraduate Eleazar Lim.

Kenny Choy handles the project management functions involving planning, forecasting, marketing the firm's product to key investors, partners and strategic advisors. His other business counterpart, Marcus Ng focuses on the development and execution of its operations and marketing strategies to clients and users, leaving its technical co-founder Eleazar Lim to lead a team of five other programmers to develop and improve the product. I met Marcus from the NBS Freshmen Orientation Camp. My first impression of him was that he was a matured and reserved person. He was the complete opposite of me that I thought would help to compliment my strengths.

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The idea struck us when we were having supper one day as mentioned above. We subsequently met up at Starbucks (for a full day) scribbling our vision and strategies out on blank papers. The next step was to find a fantastic tech co-founder.

Inspired by the YouTube video titled “12 Lessons Steve Jobs Taught Guy Kawasaki”, we knew we couldn’t settle with anything less than an “A+” guy. We asked around for the best tech guy in SMU (because my former roomie from NTU Computer Science told me that they don’t learn xcode, which was critical for iOS application development) and were given a few names.

We searched them on Facebook, printed their faces and waited for them at the lobby of SMU School of Information Systems (SMU SIS). The first we saw was Eleazar and we went up to him.

Me: “Hi, are you Eleazar?”

Eleazar: “Yep, you are?”

Me: “Kenny and this is Marcus. We want to start up a company that make people want to look at advertisements. We think you are the right fit for the team, do you have five minutes to spare?”

We requested him to sign a non-disclosure form. Eleazar barely looked at it and went ahead to pen his signature. We shared the idea with him, we shook hands and the rest were history.

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When would the official launch date be?

Our closed beta is tentatively set to end by mid-April. We should be conducting our first public launch following the closed beta. We may however be controlling our growth to ensure the quality of our services to advertisers and users.

Author's note: While the idea sounds promising, I'm skeptical if it will take off, as WhatsApp's cofounder Jan Koum puts it, no one wakes up excited to see more advertising, no one goes to sleep thinking about the ads they'll see tomorrow. We will definitely keep an eye for this new company in Singapore.