

Keptme in the loop

ET Staff



Documentation, it's a necessary evil. So what if there was an app that helped to ease the burden and allowed teachers more time to be spent with children on their development and education? That was the bright idea behind the app Keptme which has grown rapidly in four short years to achieve a global presence.

Documentation aside, given that younger and younger students have a very advanced command of technology there is also huge opportunity for tech-leveraged mischief, case in point the bomb threats that hit several schools in Melbourne in February this year which were placed by auto-call through the dark web and thus almost impossible to trace. In that sort of situation having a reliable, secure platform for communication is at a premium.

Keptme co-founder Steve Stojanovski says the idea was to put together a platform that would allow regular updates about students to be sent to parents through the school day, act as a repository for students' writing and drawing and map activity to stated learning outcomes, all under an umbrella of absolute security. The app has hit a note, being adopted by some 5500 schools in countries as diverse as Hong Kong, Japan, Canada, the UK and Australia.

During the research phase for Keptme, Stojanovski says teachers made it very clear that they wouldn't use an app that merely took pictures and sent them to parents, it had to be integrated with the stated goals and structures education authorities had put in place here and overseas.

The app takes advantage of a tablet device's image capture and video functions to record a child's activity during the day, these images or recordings are organised into editable stories while an icon driven timeline provides very detailed profile of a child's daily activities. Once completed a child's profile can be shared with parents at the push of a button. Records matched to desired learning outcomes can be accessed through the app's advanced functions and Keptme then facilitates forward planning based on what has been recorded.

"Our kids go to these schools to spend time with passionate educators and far too often a lot of their time is spent on documentation. When we started, feedback indicated that the teachers weren't interested in something that would take up more of their time. Those discussions evolved and we asked them, 'where is the time going?'"

Stojanovski estimates that it takes a typical user about 20 minutes to get up to speed with the app.

"It became evident that the documentation and the need to comply with different learning frameworks from the government as to what sort of evidence they needed to provide for learning was taking up a lot of teachers' time. Fundamentally, educators are there to help the kids grow and develop but they've got these pressures around documentation to handle and that's what we sought to alleviate," Stojanovski says.

Keptme took a global view from the beginning, identifying what would be required of the app around the world. In the Australian setting the Early Learning Framework flows into the National Quality Framework and everything

needs to comply with that structure. In the UK, the Early Years Foundation Stage framework requires a slightly different focus while other markets where Keptme operates like Canada and Hong Kong present their own set of specific requirements.

"We spent about 12 months on R&D identifying how different education systems worked and we used that information to architect the platform. With a small amount of effort on our part we can adapt the system to suit the various educational frameworks around the world," Stojanovski says.

The differences between the various Keptme supported frameworks comes down to the local curricula of the country. For example, in Australia teachers need to document that what is taking place in the classroom and track learning to the stated learning outcomes. The children need to demonstrate specific behaviours and Keptme offers a more optimal route to documentation and mapping of their learning. By contrast, in the US it's quite different, being more about language, numeracy and literacy.

"It was quite challenging, there is a quick way and there's a long way. We could have taken the easy path and said we'll create something that will solve the problems of educators in say Victoria or we can broaden our horizons and build a platform that is so scalable and so dynamic that we can plug into any market globally."

During their research Stojanovski and cofounders Leonard Ng and Christina Keing (who are husband and wife) saw that there was nothing in the marketplace which was a dedicated solution to the communication and documentation that Keptme offers.

"We saw that teachers were basically making do, some were using a paper based system, others were registering Facebook group pages and uploading pictures of kids to public Facebook pages, which wasn't great; there was the right intention but there wasn't the privacy and security element which Keptme offers.

"We asked, 'how can we take things which people are familiar with like installing an app and sending and receiving messages and merge them with these other ideas?' We're not building a social platform, what we're trying to do is build a closed loop system where it's all about privacy and security," he says.

With Stojanovski and cofounder Christina Keing coming from an IT security background the software was designed to be absolutely watertight which is at a premium when there is a crisis at hand. With the Keptme app, user

registrations and bulletproof security ensure the absolute veracity of communications being delivered.

Stojanovski cites another security crisis that hit close to home, the bushfires that claimed the lives of many Victorian people several years ago.

“The government’s response was to create a monolithic, huge SMS reporting system that was incredibly expensive, its open nature also meant that it was open to misuse. An app like Keptme offers a similar function without the cost (the basic version of the app is free) and with increased security,” he says.

“We’ve built a communication platform where educators must log in. We know it’s a genuine educator logging in because they’re using their own credentials, it’s not like SMS where someone can pick up a phone and send a message.

“It’s about establishing a relationship between the parents and the educator. We don’t just drop the kids off and pick them up eight hours later, we have a relationship based on trust between the parents and teachers; parents are saying that they love having more involvement with their children during the day, while educators are saying they love using it, that they’re saving so much time and it’s helping to build their brand and relationships,” he says.

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