Lazarillo App: Orientation and Autonomy for People with Visual Impairment

René Espinoza

Technology is changing the way we interact with the world and access to services and products. Companies are eager to use technology to reach as many clients as possible. Although many companies are missing digital accessibility, leaving a growing population out without them knowing. Lazarillo is helping both sides of the equation.

Lazarillo is a company founded in Chile by 2016 with the mission to improve the quality of life and autonomy of people with disabilities, creating tools that enhance the relationship between people and institutions, making the world a more accessible and connected place.

René Espinoza, CEO of LazarilloApp, realized that it was necessary to create an effective tool for institutions to easily improve the digital accessibility of their spaces and services connected to mobile assistance that uses this information to help the user navigate through the space or know about the institution's services.

Lazarillo first started as a thesis project, while René was studying Electrical Engineering and working part-time in a medical center helping doctors develop assistive technologies. During that time he was asked to develop a mobile app for blind people, after interviewing 30 people with different visual disabilities and researching on the standards for web and mobile accessibility he finished that project but discovered a bigger issue, most mobile apps are not accessible and most of the people he interviewed needed to rely on somebody else to do their daily routes or even on a stranger if they missed a stop. He decided to dedicate his thesis to solve this issue with the help of Miguel González. Miguel was born blind and by the time he met Rene he was a specialized teacher on assistive technologies, with his feedback and testing with multiple users, after a year a final prototype was born with great results and a year after more Lazarillo became a startup with government funding from CORFO Chile's entrepreneur organization. Running the business with Jonathan Taivo as COO and Alvaro Bravo as CMO who joined Lazarillo as a cofounder.

Today Lazarillo has grown to 160,000 users globally in 39 countries and it is available in 22 languages including Arabic. With its platform, it has digitized and made accessible 66 locations of companies that include Banks, hospitals, university campuses, museums, retail stores, parks, and public buildings. This tool that first started as an assistant for visually impaired users has been gradually growing becoming a universal tool that provides new capabilities in places they mapped such as accessible routing for wheelchair users and with the integration with key partners can provide on-demand sign language interpretation on the companies venues.

Miguel Gonzalez UX Leader of Lazarillo

Lazarillo is currently growing with the help of local partners distributors that use the Lazarillo platform to integrate with local companies and public institutions making countries more accessible. Currently, Lazarillo is working with partners in the US, Mexico, Costa Rica, and Uruguay.

Due to the current pandemic of the COVID-19 Lazarillo is taking action. After talking to its users one of the key problems they identified, is the accessibility of digital resources. Local entities are providing and posting resources on social media platforms even though most of the resources get lost in the feeds with a bunch of news and people with disabilities usually miss it and have a lot of difficulties to find it again, for example, forms for diagnostics or links for free telemedicine consults, list of phone numbers for medical consults by state or regions and all sort of actionable resources that a user are missing plus many of this information aren't in an accessible format as some institutions are responding as fast as possible and are not taking care of the accessibility of its information. Using Lazarillo's service institutions ensure the accessibility of their contents, as it reviews and makes the adaptations as needed and then notifies the users in specific geographic regions.

To learn more about our work visit our website at www.lazarillo.app

If you would like to learn more about the COVID-19 service contact us now! covid19@lazarillo.app

René Espinoza, Founder and CEO of Lazarillo, a startup that developed a platform and mobile App for institutions to digitize their services and spaces to make them more accessible for clients with disabilities, selected as part of the Techdiversity program from Tampa Bay Wave 2019. Espinoza is a 29 years old Electrical Engineer from the Universidad de Chile, specialized in electronics, mobile and assistive technologies. He has worked in previous startups in the fields of mobile apps and health devices. Espinoza, selected as MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Innovator under 35 Latam 2019, is a fellow from the Collective Global Accelerator, Westerwelle Young Founders Program and the Young Leaders of America Initiative.