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Julia founders create new startup to take language commercial

The idea to leverage Julia's fill potential occurred to founders, after being approached by a New York hedge fund with a contract to commercialise the language.

Anirban Sen | ET Bureau | May 09, 2015, 14:04 IST

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For Viral B Shah and three other research scientists and programming geeks, the Valentine's Day of 2012 had a different significance. That was the day when they announced to the world about a programming language they had developed.



Make your cyber life a little safer in 2013 (Thinkstock photos/Getty Images)

More than three years since, Shah,

Stefan Karpinski, Jeff Bezanson and Alan Edelman, who announced the development in a blog post tilted `Why We Created Julia', have decided to go one step further and commercialise their creation. They have launched a startup, Julia Computing, to provide services such as support, training and consulting services for Julia, for a fee.

"For us, it was to follow our passion and that's when we decided to start Julia," says Shah, who had also worked with Infosys cofounder Nandan Nilekani for the government's unique identification project. "So, from the original Julia Community, we have come a very long way. We have half a dozen customers across the US and India now."

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The idea to leverage Julia and create the startup came up somewhere between December 2013 and January 2014, after the founders were approached by a New York hedge fund that offered them a contract to commercialise the programming language and realise its full potential.

"What happened was that the hedge fund said, `you guys take control now'. They told us, `raise money, this can be commercial and a massive opportunity'," said Shah.

The founders then decided to beef up their team with executives and entrepreneurs who had experience in building earlystage startups and companies. That was when former IBM executive Deepak Vinchhi and Harvard University undergraduate Keno Fischer came on board.

"One of the reasons why we grew our founding team was to have a good mix of technical strength as well as business strength. That's why Deepak joined us -- he is helping us grow the business. It's good to have someone who is actually fulltime focused on growing the business. Because, finally you can build the technology , but without business it will not take off," says the 35-year-old. A number of corporates across the world are now finding real-world use for Julia, which can be deployed in enterprises in areas such as data science and recommendation engines, especially in sectors such as ecommerce, finance and engineering.

Most of these companies are looking to solve challenging, mathematical problems or quickly crunch several terabytes of data, Shah said.

Meanwhile, Julia Computing is developing three products, as the founders explore newer streams of revenue generation. The startup is currently completely bootstrapped and has about a dozen employees including the founders, with no immediate plans for raising funds.

"These are not customers we picked randomly.We work with them because they realised the value and potential of Julia," he said. "There are distantly three things that are emerging out of it: firstly, Julia Enterprise, which is targeting the Big Data, data-processing platforms kind of stuff. Second is in the embedded (devices and platforms) space ... It is almost ready -- so in theory, by next year, Julia could be working on the iPhone and Android platforms ... Thirdly, there is Julia Box, which is basically Julia on the cloud."

For Julia Box, the startup recently signed a partnership with ecommerce giant Amazon, where customers are able to use the cloud

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offering for free, with Julia Computing getting free credits from Amazon.

Shah said there are plans to commercialise Julia Box in the near future, where customers can opt for a pay-as-you-go model.

Now as Julia Computing prepares to put its next set of plans into motion, the company is starting to garner attention from some of the world's largest corporates, such as General Electric.

Shah declined to comment on whether Julia Computing has had talks with GE. A person familiar with the matter said the US conglomerate has started exploring the potential of Julia.

Shah, who mostly focuses on business and product development at Julia Computing, had also played a role in Nilekani's Lok Sabha campaign last year through political startup FourthLion Technologies.

He is now coauthoring a book with the former Infosys chief executive.





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