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Entrepreneur Berkowitz transitions from SeeClickFix owner to employee



Ben Berkowitz

BY NATALIE MISSAKIAN
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Ben Berkowitz has spent more than a dozen years building and nurturing SeeClickFix, the civic engagement platform he launched in New Haven in 2007 and expanded into 400 cities around the world.

So it's only natural he's still getting used to life and his new role after selling the startup for an undisclosed price to a Kansas-based government website developer last October.

SeeClickFix has remained in New Haven and Berkowitz continues to run the platform, albeit in a new vice president and general manager position at the parent company, CivicPlus. It's a transition that has him both energized and sleeping a little easier at night.



"The biggest change for me personally is going from feeling like I'm on the hook individually for 30-plus people's livelihoods and the health of the platform to being one person in a much larger organization," says the 41-year-old entrepreneur.

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The SeeClickFix website and mobile app allow residents in a community to alert government agencies to non-emergency problems ranging from potholes and broken streetlights to, in the age of COVID-19, non-compliance with social distancing protocol.

Berkowitz says there's been no shortage of suitors for the startup as it grew to dominate the North American service request management space in recent years.

He never felt a strong urge to sell the company, but says he was open if the right opportunity came along from a buyer committed to growing the platform and following its mission of community change.

"I actually only had one company in mind as the ideal company," he says. "And it was this company, CivicPlus, which ended up making the best offer as well."

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Berkowitz grew up in New Haven's Westville neighborhood and has always been passionate about promoting and bettering his home city, where he returned to live after graduating from George Washington University in 2001.

He spent his 20s "living somewhere between artist and entrepreneur," dabbling in ventures that ranged from designing websites to selling computer chips to peddling T-shirts with a purpose.



His first company sold tens of thousands of shirts with the slogan “Marriage is so gay,” promoting marriage equality. Another shirt proclaimed “New Haven. It’s better than your town.”

The spark for SeeClickFix came after he attempted to have graffiti removed from a building near his apartment on State Street.

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“I realized that there was a lack of accountability and that the city was probably not going to respond to my issue,” he recalls. “I wondered if my neighbors had reported similar issues.”

SeeClickFix users can comment on the site about problems and can add photos or videos to document the situation. The official government response is also tracked and publicly visible.

Even as the company website proclaims it has fixed nearly 6.5 million issues (and counting) as of mid-August, Berkowitz says he still finds himself surprised when the platform is used.

But he is proud that it has become a place on the internet where people are working together on issues, rather than just “showing up to shame people.”

“I like that it solves an actual problem and creates constructive dialogue,” he says.

Beyond SeeClickFix, he has channeled his civic pride and love of the Elm City into numerous community projects, such as a new skatepark that just opened at Scantlebury Park near downtown (he’s an avid skater) and a pop-up art show on Fair Haven’s Mill Street that drew steady crowds before being shut down by COVID-19.

He also sits on the boards of Make Haven, a downtown makerspace, and the Westville Village Renaissance Alliance, a business and neighborhood booster organization.

His next big endeavor? Settling his young family (including his wife, two children 4 and 7, and two dogs) into their new, larger home in the city’s Prospect Hill historic district.

“This was kind of a dream home for my wife and I,” he says. “We love New Haven and wanted to find a home that we could really be comfortable in.”

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