

WINNER

THE CREATIVE COUNSEL YOUNG JEWISH ENTREPRENEUR AWARD

Ryan Canin

CEO and co-founder, DocFox Inc.



From a tiny start-up in a loft, Ryan Canin, 27, has built a small IT empire that now includes Silicon Valley clients in the US, based on his brilliant app that makes document submission as easy as a few taps on your smartphone.

A man with equal right and left brain gifts, he tirelessly applied both to make his idea a reality and as such, he is a natural Jewish Achiever winner.

Canin is the brain behind DocFox, a web application that simplifies Know Your Customer (KYC) compliance for financial services firms, including data collection and verification, risk rating and international watchlist screening.

“DocFox helps customers submit their FICA documents electronically in just a few taps. Customers can upload copies of their proof of identity and address documents, or submit documents using their smartphone camera,” explains Canin.

Since it was launched two years ago, DocFox has set up an office in the US, with Silicon Valley funding and US clients that include two banks. DocFox has also managed to secure a partnership with global law firm Norton Rose Fulbright.

DocFox falls under the ambit of Canin’s first company Gladi8, a fintech software business that was launched in 2012 while he was studying electrical engineering at the University of the Witwatersrand.

It was while serving his Gladi8 clients, which included large financial services institutions such as Liberty, Barclays and Standard Bank, that he spotted the need for a KYC solution.

Plans now are to expand internationally via its US investor network and Norton Rose Fulbright’s global presence across Africa, Europe, the US, Canada, Latin America, Asia, Australia, the Middle East and Central Asia. And, of course, the idea is for DocFox to become the dominant KYC software in South Africa.

In 2003, while at school, he was junior mayor of Johannesburg, and due to his success in debating at the national level, he was hired in 2010 as the debating coach for King David Linksfield High School.

“My interests have always been broad ranging, from economics, politics and philosophy, which I explored through national debating, to the arts, indulging in acting, oil painting and piano,” he says.

In 2013, Canin graduated with a BSc Engineering from Wits and he started his career right away with Bain & Company, as an associate consultant intern.

“I worked on customer improvement for a telecommunications company in Nigeria. I discovered errors in the client’s customer feedback data, ascertained it was human error and then developed a training pack for the call centre staff,” he says.

Two years later, he was well on his way to consolidating and growing Gladi8, the precursor to DocFox.

Entrepreneurship has always pumped through his veins. At the age of 13, Canin raised R240 000 to fund a Guinness World Record to build the world’s largest canned food construction.

“After one year of planning, we built a canned food rocket out of 26 656 cans of the 36 000 cans collected.” He won the

record, and it took the efforts of Montana State University to break it in 2008.

The DocFox team has been built through personal and investor networks, says Canin, “bringing on board people with the most experience and demonstrated excellence.

“We’ve had some tough times, and we are going through an uncertain time at the moment, where trust in government has been eroded. But I’ve been blessed to work with incredible people, and have been privileged to have my life filled with trusted advisers and mentors, including top CEOs locally and abroad,” says Canin, a member of the Entrepreneurs Organisation, a global networking forum for young business leaders.

Canin says opportunities can be accessed by simply being open to them. “I believe success is based on being open-minded, and having what I call ‘unreasonable ambition’. I also believe that success can’t be built by one man alone.

“It’s important that I have a team of people who surround me and who buy into my vision and share my joy in achieving it. In my mind, as long as we’re having fun and chasing unreasonably ambitious opportunities, we’re doing the right thing,” he says.

Looking at the future, Canin feels that South Africa needs

to shift B-BBEE focus to contribute to educating previously disadvantaged youth, to “try and break the poverty cycle and give more people a chance of getting out of a prescribed career path in menial labour.

“Business creates jobs, stimulates the economy and drives positive change. So, you don’t need to be a philanthropist to be driven to give back, you just need to want to grow your business and the positive effects in the country will follow.

“Therefore, I believe that assisting entrepreneurs is the best way in which we can help the country.”

On weekends, Canin says he reads the *SA Jewish Report* as a “community catch-up”, although he thinks it might be more impactful “if it covered a broader range of topics outside of the Jewish world”.

Being nominated in the Jewish Achiever Awards has been “incredible for me as far as creating visibility and gaining contacts. The process has been a brilliant exercise, forcing us to refine our pitch,” he says.

On week nights, he’s at home with his partner for uninterrupted dinner. “I try and create protected pockets of time on the weekend to grow my personal relationships. Otherwise, the rest of my time is spent on a mix of business and non-profit, both of which give me much pleasure.”