

**M**artin Heikel '81 BS is giving New York City cab drivers a new set of eyes on city streets. He created the smart phone application, ZabKab, which better connects taxi drivers and passengers.

“There was a problem that existed in NYC that could be solved with new technology: Taxi drivers who are cruising around empty 30 to 40 percent of the time without a passenger. So you have these two parties that are searching for one another with an inefficient system,” says Heikel, who has a marketing management degree. “We gave some

thought to that and thought geez, there’s got to be a better way, and that’s how the idea got started.”

The ZabKab app was designed to improve upon a system that has worked for generations. Heikel acknowledges that there isn’t much simpler than just putting one’s arm up to hail a cab, but he said problems arise when people aren’t on main streets where cabs typically run. The app will help drivers see people on sidestreets, and passengers will no longer have to walk to busy thoroughfares in order to find a cab.

# “Taxi!”

By Lucy Hough '12 BA

“If the cab only knew where you stood in the sidestreet, then they’d be more than willing to make the attempt to go pick you up,” Heikel says.

Building on the tradition of simplicity, the ZabKab app is straightforward in its design. Though Heikel says it involves complicated programming, the goal was to make the interface easy to use.

“We wanted to make sure that when you open the app, whether you’re the consumer or the driver, it’s clean, intuitive and doesn’t take a lot of study. We’re trying to make getting a cab easier, simpler and save someone time.”

When downloading the app for a smart phone or tablet, users choose whether they are a passenger or a driver.

The app is free for passengers, who simply press a button to notify drivers of their location (the number of presses indicates the number of passengers). Drivers, after a 60-day free trial, pay between \$10 and \$15 per month for the service, which allows them to see the exact location of passengers within a few blocks. Both the driver and passenger are anonymous on the app.

Passengers aren’t required to wait for a ZabKab-hailed taxi if another cab comes along sooner. Drivers are not obligated to pick up a ZabKab fare if they see another passenger first.

Since the beta launch in August 2012, the app has seen a lot of media and user success. Within 10 days, 2,000 drivers downloaded the



*Inventor Martin Heikel, cofounder of Flatiron Apps Company*

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app. And within the first couple weeks, 40,000 passengers downloaded it.

“I think it drew so much media attention because as a New Yorker where there’s 8.5 million people, almost everybody has used a yellow cab on occasion so it’s something that everyone could relate to,” Heikel says. “Because our app is relatively simple to explain, and it’s a ‘wow, why didn’t I think of that’ concept, it made it highly intriguing for a lot of people.”

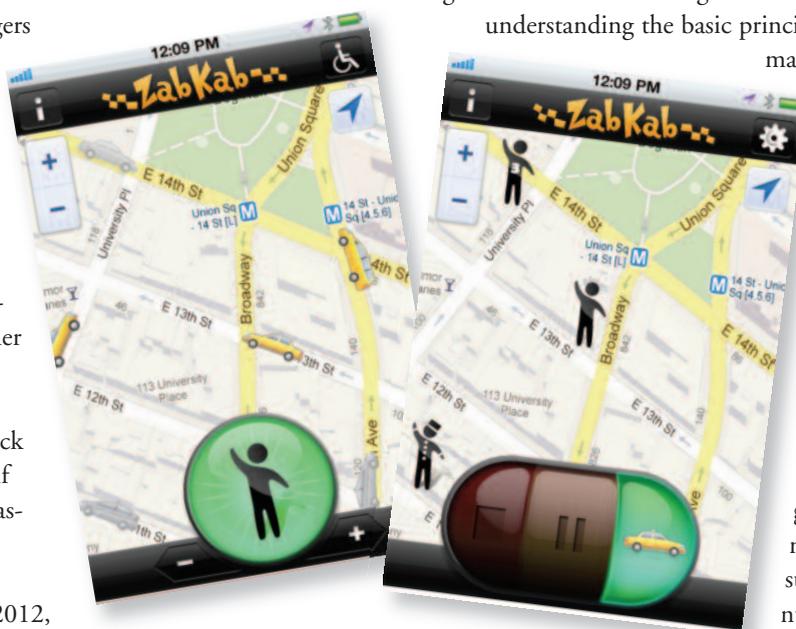
To make the app usable by both drivers and passengers, Heikel had to learn a lot about the taxi industry, including unions, various stakeholders, interest groups, regulatory issues, some New York City politics and more. Heikel, who has previously held positions as director of global account sales for MCI, director of Verizon Financial Network and executive

director of Verizon Enterprise Integration Services, said that continual learning is integral to his business success.

“What I learned in the marketing management program at Northern was a good business foundation— understanding the basic principles of business and

marketing in particular. To understand the language, the terminology, it provided a good baseline.”

Heikel and his team plan to expand awareness for the app to other urban areas throughout the world. Technically, the app will work in any location (and any language on a user’s mobile device), but its success depends on the number of drivers and passengers who download it. For now, they are focusing primarily on New York City. ■



*An example of the passenger app screen is shown on the left; a driver's screen on the right. The ZabKab site explains that "when passengers touch the screen's 'hail' button, nearby cabs hear a ping to notify them that a potential fare is nearby." For safety, drivers can only view the location of the potential passenger when their vehicle is stopped.*