

Startup to expand online immigration services with acquisition of RapidVisa

September 2 2020, by Geoff Baker, The Seattle Times



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Boundless Immigration co-founder Xiao Wang sounds frustrated discussing the tightened rules and processing delays for visas and citizenship that have hallmarked the Trump administration.

But he also sees that as an opportunity to expand his Seattle-based online company that helps streamline the immigration application process, especially amid a COVID-19 pandemic that has people worried about visiting a lawyer's office or seeking additional help with an application from more traditional brick-and-mortar businesses.

To that end, Boundless has acquired Las Vegas-based RapidVisa, another immigration navigation company specializing in multiple visa categories. Wang declined to disclose the purchase price.

The deal lets Wang's firm expand beyond the 3,000 marriage-based visa and citizenship applications it processes annually. Wang expects the combined operations to handle about 10,000 applications, much of that growth in new categories for children, parents, fiances, tourists and others.

"The more products and services that we can offer, the more data that we can collect, the better the advice and the help we can provide to our (customer) families," Wang said Tuesday, adding the acquisition—terms of which were not disclosed—will double his staff from about 50 to more than 100 and makes Boundless the nation's largest online immigration industry company. "We can help people that have all of these additional family-based immigration needs."

As an example, he said, the company could previously have helped a foreign national marrying a U.S. citizen. But if the foreign national had a child from a previous relationship, there was nothing his company could do.

"We could help with the marriage green card for the spouses, but we couldn't help with the child," he said. "Now, we can help with the child."

The company, founded in 2017, collects information online from applicants and uses technology to fill out forms for them, offering advice and support. Its website also tracks applications once submitted, sending regular alerts about how they are progressing. Wang said Boundless remains unprofitable and declined to disclose its revenue.

Boundless Immigration's website and its frequently updated blog has become a go-to for information on a plethora of immigration rule changes and crackdowns by the Trump administration the past three-plus years. Wang expects the RapidVisa acquisition to increase the information Boundless has at its disposal to share with users.

The acquisition was financed partly by a \$7.5 million equity funding round from Foundry Group. Wang said some of that money will also go toward preparing his company to "meaningfully scale" for what he believes will be a huge surge in demand, regardless of who gets elected president come November.

"No matter what happens, there's going to be a ton of change in the immigration process," he said. "If Trump wins, there's going to be all of these continued new regulations that we'll need to stay on top of. If Biden wins, then there will potentially be entirely new categories, especially around DACA and 'Dreamers' and other groups that really share bipartisan support for making reforms that can help families not be in perpetual limbo."

Boundless Immigration's blog posted in July that are at risk of not being able to vote in the election because of the current freeze on naturalization interviews—the final step before the 140-word Oath of Allegiance ceremony. Initially, another 110,000 people were also at risk of not voting because the oath ceremonies themselves were being held up—until U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) agreed to start resuming shorter, less crowded sessions.

Some jurisdictions now offer drive-thru naturalization ceremonies where applicants pull up in their vehicles in front of a judge standing six feet away and behind a plastic shield. They then take the oath and are granted citizenship without leaving the car.

"The political leadership of USCIS could have made this happen faster," the Boundless Immigration post stated. "For instance, they claimed that it would be legally impossible to administer virtual oath ceremonies, which is not true."

The Trump administration has stated the oath must be taken in a public ceremony. However, lawmakers from both parties and immigration advocates argue there's nothing in statutory language requiring the applicant to appear in-person.

Wang can't understand why the government is forcing applicants into longer wait times, or making them attend ceremonies with others during a pandemic when there's an obvious virtual solution for an oath that's important—but also largely ceremonial.

"I think people on both sides of the aisle would agree we want government agencies to operate as efficiently as they can to achieve their mandate," he said.

A big reason for Boundless Immigration's expansion, he added, is to

empower those trying to navigate an increasingly backlogged system by making them aware of their immigration rights. And to streamline help in as efficient a manner as possible without entailing COVID-19 risks.

"I think we're at an inflection point with regards to the way people think of what's possible to be done remotely," he said. "I think we're all experiencing this in different workplaces in different forms and with different levels of services.

"And I think people are far more comfortable now than they were before with doing tasks remotely. And they're also appreciating the flexibility and benefits of that."

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Citation: Startup to expand online immigration services with acquisition of RapidVisa (2020, September 2) retrieved 30 April 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2020-09-startup-online-immigration-acquisition-rapidvisa.html>

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