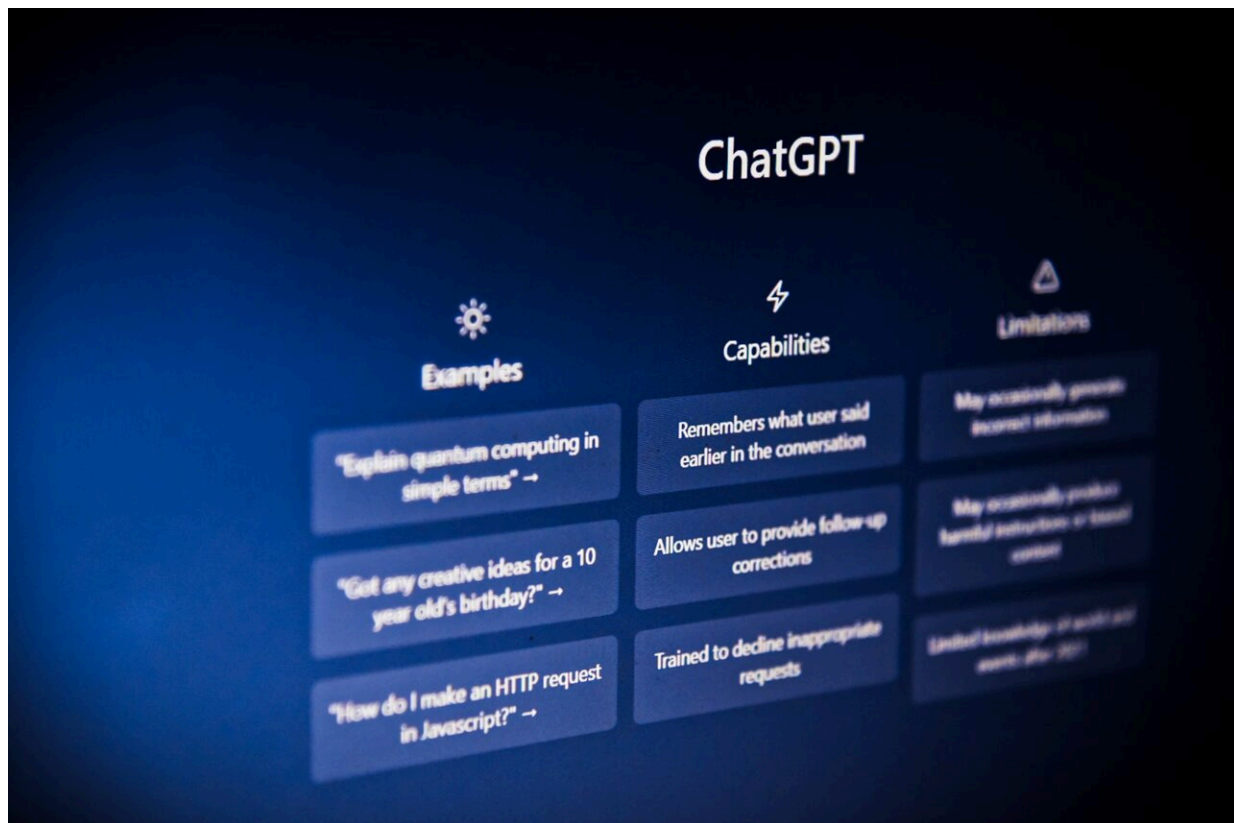


Startup will use ChatGPT to answer online reviews on Yelp and Google

March 9 2023, by Mike Freeman



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San Diego digital marketing outfit SOCi said Tuesday that it raised \$120 million in a tough funding environment for startups to bulk up artificial intelligence in its software platform—including the integration of

OpenAI's ChatGPT to respond to online reviews.

The company also will use the additional funding to expand into new markets, including manufactured goods. The money brings the total amount raised by SOCi to \$230 million since it was founded in 2012.

SOCi's software targets brands with multiple locations, such as Ace Hardware, Jersey Mike's, Kumon and Ford. It helps them manage and collect data from their search and [social media presence](#) through a centralized platform—and in particular their reputations on review websites.

The company, led by neuro and data scientists, has been developing a new line of "Genius" products to further tap [artificial intelligence](#) and machine learning models to automate [digital marketing](#) and decision-making.

As part of that effort, SOCi announced last month that its online review response software tool—which integrates with major review sites including Google, Facebook, and Yelp—has tapped ChatGPT to deliver personalized, relevant responses to each reviewer.

"In an organization that is receiving reviews across thousands of locations, this could take the responsibility and cost of responding out of the hands of thousands of individuals, and dwindle it down to just a handful of individuals at corporate who are reviewing the list of automated responses," said Afif Khoury, [chief executive](#) and co-founder of SOCi, in an email response to questions. "The savings and efficiency delivered are unmatched, and more importantly, the customer experience and reputation of the brand are the healthiest it's ever been."

ChatGPT, a generative AI chatbot, has been the buzz of the business world since it was released in November. It can deliver responses to

prompts in a thorough, human-like and conversational manner.

But it also has sparked a fair amount of handwringing over potential downsides, such as using it for school homework or writing malicious computer code. Big tech outfits including Microsoft have touted the technology as potentially disrupting Internet search, while others see it as eliminating jobs.

Asked if using ChatGPT to respond to reviewers might alienate them, Khoury said, "ultimately it will be our responsibility to build up AI solutions to deliver not only a responsive experience but one that is customized so that every customer feels heard and gets the attention and answers that they seek."

The [company](#) employs 600 workers. The funding round was led by JMI Equity, with participation from Vertical Venture Partners, Blossom Street Ventures and strategic investor Renew Group Private Ltd.—the owner of 5-Hour Energy International.

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