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This Hong Kong 'Smart Ring' Startup Raised \$2.5M To Crack The Wearables Market

By Ralph Jennings, Former Contributor. ⓘ

Published Jun 07, 2018 at 11:00pm EDT, Updated Jun 07, 2018 at 11:00pm EDT

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than 7 years old.



Origami Labs co-founders Emile Chan, Marcus Leung-Shea and Johan Wong wear their Orii rings. (photo... [+]
ORIGAMI LABS

When you think wearables, the first things that come to mind are probably smartwatches and fitness bands. Wearables surfaced as a mainstream consumer electronics trend about four years ago, but eventually the trend tapered.

One Hong Kong startup, Origami Labs, is widening the wearables wardrobe with a

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finger ring that
answers phone
calls.

The ring, called
Orii, receives any
kind of
smartphone
notification, like a
text message. The
wearer can use the
device to take a
call or activate a
phone's voice
assistant, hearing
by placing the
ringed finger close
to one's ear. The
ring communicates
with a phone via
Bluetooth, with the
user's finger bones
conducting the
sound (painlessly).

Orii functions
something like a
wireless earbud
but never has to be
taken off until the
battery dies after
about 48 hours of

standby time.

“It’s truly a wearable in that it serves as a notification device,” co-founder Johan Wong said at the 2.5-year-old firm’s booth at the InnoVEX tech show in Taipei this week. It’s ideal, he adds, “in a private setting, or [if] you’re outdoors or you’re on the go.”

After the user presses a button, he says, “then [the ring] will either read out whatever info,” audibly like a text message, “or you can just jump on the call.”

What got it going

The four Origami

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Labs founders got the idea as students at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Wong's father, now in his 50s, had trouble seeing and wanted some way to use smartphones without looking at the screen.

The product that launched late last year has sold 5,000 boxes—of four to 10 rings each—with another 5,000 expected to move by the end of August. Orders are coming mainly from Singapore, Hong Kong, Japan and Taiwan as well as Europe and the United States.

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Origami Labs has raised \$500,000 in crowdfunding and closed a hefty total funding of \$2.5 million , Wong said. One of its founders is China-based Alibaba Entrepreneurs Fund for startups.

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A set of rings sells
for \$160 after
production in
Taiwan and final
assembly in China.

Magic ring or just another wearable?

Whether Origami
Labs will see
further
funding, increased
orders, or even an
IPO is hard to say.
Wong says the
point for now is to
make a “kick-butt”
product.

The ring’s success
could come down
to fashion. The
boxy Orii ring
looms larger on
the finger than the
average wedding
ring, and Origami
Labs demos it by
encouraging
people to use the

index rather than
ring finger.

“It's always neat to
see creative ideas
like this,” says
Bryan Ma, Vice
President of Client
Devices Research
with the market
analysis firm IDC.
Ma points out that
Bluetooth headsets
have become
accepted in day-to-
day life, “as
awkward as they
might've looked at
first.”

“As with many
wearable devices
though, tech and
fashion don't
always mix
together very well,
and society might
not quickly accept
the idea of putting
your finger next to
your ear either,”
Ma says.



An Orii ring is tried at the Slush start-up events in Tokyo, March 28, 2018. (Alessandro Di... [+]

Vendors will sell 411 million wearable devices in 2020, worth \$34 billion, up from \$14 billion in 2016 , CSS Insight says as [cited here](#). But by last year, forecasts were getting [more conservative](#). A lot of those shipments were watches, as well. Reports such as [this one](#) point to a shakier market.

Smartrings aren't a new concept, either; Wareable.com released a list of some [top performers](#) earlier

this year. But
still...they don't
answer phones
through your
bones.

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