



where
digital
happens

Desifa Ltd

Established: 2018

Founders: **Martin Phillips and Steven Tinkler**

Based: **Sadberge**

Staff: **2**

Principal product: **HearClear Smartphone App**

Case Study



“Without the DigitalCity Fellowship there is no way we would have been having discussions with investors now. It has given us the right people to speak to at the right time, which has fast-tracked our business.” **Steve Tinkler – Director, Desifa Ltd**

It's demonstration day in a room at Teesside University and one business is about to make technology history. As the audience of academics, angel investors, venture capitalists and other candidates on DigitalCity's Fellowship programme look on, a telephone rings. Martin Phillips is calling from outside a Starbucks café on Sixth Avenue in New York City, the very spot where, in 1973, the first ever call was made from a mobile phone.

In another debut, this time in Middlesbrough, Martin's business partner Steven Tinkler receives what they believe is the world's first intercontinental closed caption video call through their revolutionary new app HearClear.

That was in the autumn of 2018 after pioneers Martin and Steven applied successfully to the Fellowship programme to support their company, Desifa, and its ambition to harness smart technology to improve telephone conversations for the hard of hearing. Prompted by Martin's wife's hearing difficulties, their partnership came about after Martin had an idea for an app that would allow her to keep in touch with their son Josh, who had moved to the United States.

“Like many people she struggles to hear people on the phone. I assumed that there would be an app for it, but there wasn't,” explains Martin. “People with hearing difficulties find the experience of making a simple phone call tiring, stressful, often upsetting and downright disheartening.”

Although a range of solutions existed, Martin was unable to identify anything suitable.

The aim was to create a means of capturing all the ways that we hear, communicate and understand. Many hours of work followed to build HearClear, a simple 'plug-and-play' subscription-based product that allows users to access sound, subtitles, speech reading and sign to support them in making telephone calls.

The impact of being accepted onto the Fellowship Programme was immense, even for experienced professionals, as their business idea was validated.

“Knowing that a panel of people, who've seen countless business ideas, thought we had hit on something built up our confidence and encouraged us to actively engage with our market,” says Steve.

Alongside financial support, DigitalCity provided a structured programme supported by business coaching.

Steve, who has run his own business since 2004, adds: “I'd recommend anyone on future programmes to listen to the advice. It's tried and tested and we're proof that it works.”

Desifa is beta testing HearClear with plans for a launch in the summer of 2019.

Steve says: “Without the DigitalCity Fellowship there is no way we would have been having discussions with investors now. It has given us the right people to speak to at the right time, which has fast-tracked our business.” Martin adds: “What is really valuable about what DigitalCity has given us is difficult to quantify but it is what makes business work. The critique, connections, space, support and time we have enjoyed has been integral to our development.”

Scott Watson, of DigitalCity, says: “The HearClear app is an exciting product that we think will revolutionise how the hard of hearing communicate via video platforms. We were really keen to support the business aspects of Desifa and the commercialisation of the app. As well as providing a business development grant, we were able to introduce them to potential investors who could help them take their product to the next level.”