

After months of anticipation and preparations, Start-Up Brasil announced the first batch of startups selected to join its inaugural acceleration round in July. A total of 56 projects were chosen – 46 from Brazil and 11 from abroad – out of the 908 finalists announced in June. Divvied up among nine local accelerators, the group is about to embark on a year-long program to help their businesses grow.

The startups selected are certainly diverse, representing a wide range of industries and markets. We spoke with three of them to learn more about their experiences with Start-Up Brasil thus far and gain some insights into the program.

Why Start-Up Brasil?

Start-Up Brasil is a completely new initiative, meaning the shape it's going to take isn't exactly clear. And given the plethora of acceleration and incubation programs available around the world right now, going into something brand new is, to a certain extent, a risk. Why take the jump?

For Guga Gorenstein, one of the co-founders of Brazil-based cash back startup Poup, the decision to get involved in Start-Up Brasil was based on a mix of strategy and philosophy:

The philosophy part is easy. I believe in the Start-Up Brasil program and the people who are running it, and I really want it to succeed. We thought, instead of just saying that it's good and telling other people to sign up, why don't we also sign up, as a signal of trust?

He also added the program will serve as a chance for his team to test out the changes they anticipate making to their product over the next two to three months – not to mention take advantage of the network gained through the accelerator they'll be working with, Wayra.

For bill extension platform Pagapramim, another Start-Up Brasil selection, the decision to apply was strategy-based as well. “We

applied to Start-Up Brasil because we saw an opportunity to receive the financial support and all the benefits that are involved with being accelerated. Not only the money to hire skilled professionals and develop the business, but also the mentoring, the physical infrastructure, legal advice and the eyes of experienced advisory that can take our company to another level,” explained Victor Silveira, one of the company’s co-founders.

“We also believe that Start-Up Brasil accelerated companies will have the chance to connect to potential partners during the acceleration program due to the environment that surrounds the chosen accelerators,” he added.

We also asked Sensimob, a provider of custom logistics applications for the management of mobile teams. One of the initiative’s international selections, Sensimob is based in the U.S. – though it does have a strong foothold in Brazil (its local clients include government contractors and the University of Brasília).

Andrew Travis, CEO of Sensimob, outlined the company’s path to Start-Up Brasil:

We have applied for a few programs over the last several months, with specific attention to accelerators that had experience with international enterprise-facing companies like ours. This narrowed down the prospects considerably. Some that we applied to weren’t interested in us, while others we interviewed lacked the global reach and perspective we were looking for. Start-Up Brasil was a logical choice as we have opportunities in both the U.S. and Brazilian markets. Most of our traction thus far has been in Brazil, but we are confident that the coming months will bring much growth in the U.S. as well.

On Applications and Accelerators

With any acceleration program, there are a number of hoops set up for startups to jump through before getting picked. And with Start-Up Brasil, some of those hoops stray a bit from the norm.

“I will admit the application process was very different than what is typically seen in the United States,” Travis noted. *“Rather than a simple web application, a detailed proposal was required. Although it required similar content, there was always the fear of disqualification due to formatting issues. Aside from that, the biggest hoop was waiting for the official announcement!”*

Both Silveira and Gorenstein agreed that the accelerator selection was a big step in the process. Applying startups are required to list the accelerators they want to work with, and accelerators, in turn, make their own selections as well. This is one of the most unique aspects of the Start-Up Brasil program overall.

As mentioned, Poup will be accelerated by Wayra. Pagapramim will work with Start You Up in Espírito Santo, and Sensimob with Acelera-MG (Fumsoft) in Minas Gerais. Travis clarified that the accelerator’s location within Brazil was not a deciding factor for his company, *“Our location in Silicon Valley has never been a requirement (we work from our homes most of the time) and we have international employees, partners, and customers. So our selection of accelerator was never dependent on physical location.”*

What did matter? In the case of Poup, a number of factors came under consideration. He highlighted Wayra’s extensive network and the details of the financial deal offered as major drawing points, as well as Telefónica’s support and the accelerator’s São Paulo location (where Poup is based).

What’s Next

The selected startups are now in the final stages of signing contracts and hammering out the details to officially embark in the acceleration process. Not only will they take advantage of local opportunities but also of the possibility to work out of the international Start-Up Brasil hub in the works in Silicon Valley. Silveira outlined his expectations for the program:

Right now we are about to sign the papers and start to work. We are really focused on getting the most of this experience and following all the steps of the program. Start-Up Brasil will last for 12 months, and the chosen companies will have marketing support and international infrastructure in Silicon Valley. From business development and operations to pitching to new potential investors, now is the time to accelerate, roll up our sleeves and get to work.

Beyond growing his own business, Gugenstein also sees Start-Up Brasil as a chance to help Brazil's startup ecosystem evolve. "I definitely want to help Start-Up Brasil grow stronger, as I think it can really help many startups," he affirmed.

And as for the international player in the mix, Sensimob, Start-Up Brasil is a prime opportunity to strengthen its grip in one of its major markets. That said, the startup does have a leg up on other international companies in the program in getting into the swing of things in Brazil. Travis noted:

We are lucky. Both our CTO, Alex, and our angel investor are native Brazilians, and we have several amazing business advisors who help us navigate some of the trickier aspects. That being said, it is certainly an adjustment when one is used to the way business is done in the United States. Our early progress in the country gives us confidence we can effectively penetrate the market.

Start-Up Brasil is just getting up and running, and once acceleration starts, all bets are off. We'll make sure to stay up-to-speed with the program to see how things turn out.