



Plant Tuscaloosa selects winners with best and brightest ideas

Press Information

**Two startups each awarded \$50,000 for ideas submitted for “Mercedes-Benz U.S. International Innovation Challenge”**

June 21, 2018

- Total of \$100,000 will be awarded to two winning start-ups, along with chance to be supplier for MBUSI or MBUSI’s parent company, Daimler AG.
- Plant Tuscaloosa partnered with non-profit, local university and a global innovation platform co-founded by Mercedes-Benz parent company Daimler AG

**TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA, [April 11, 2018]** – Mercedes-Benz U.S. International, Inc. (MBUSI) on June 19<sup>th</sup> selected two start-ups to receive \$50,000 each as part of its “**MBUSI Innovation Challenge**”, an initiative aimed at engaging Alabama’s thriving startup community to tackle critical challenges faced in automotive production flow management, big data efficiencies, and digital communications.

In April, MBUSI – in partnership with Urban Engine, STARTUP AUTOBAHN, and The University of Alabama – announced the strategic partnership to seek out and inspire creativity to find innovative solutions using creative business strategies, software development, and technology. More than 100 individuals or teams registered to learn more when the initial call for pitches was made in April. Once more details were shared, 29 submissions were made and the judges had a nine finalists to review on June 19<sup>th</sup>. MBUSI initially planned to award up to \$50,000, but the decision was made to recognize two groups and award \$100,000 after seeing the presentations. Both groups have a chance to become suppliers for MBUSI or MBUSI’s parent company, Daimler AG.

Winners of the inaugural event are:

- **AUTOMAP, LLP** – Awarded \$50,000 to help MBUSI enhance its on-site vehicle tracking systems for the hundreds of thousands of vehicles built each year.

- **DOKS INNOVATION GMBH, LLC** - Awarded \$50,000 for a drone-based inventory tracking and recording system.

"It was extremely inspiring and worthwhile traveling the distance from Germany to Alabama to be a part of the MBUSI Innovation Challenge," said Markus Schaefer, Member of the Divisional Board of Mercedes-Benz Cars, Production and Supply Chain Management. Schaefer noted that he's traveled around the world with START-UP AUTOBAHN (a global innovation platformed co-founded by Daimler AG) and listened to similar pitches in South Africa, Germany and other cities. "Just as Daimler changed the world in 1886 with the invention of the automobile, MBUSI began changing the face of Alabama more than 25 years ago with its announcement of plans to build vehicles in Alabama." Schaefer said that Plant Tuscaloosa has come a long way since 1993, and with Industry 4.0, electric vehicles and tools like the MBUSI Innovation Challenge, the plant is taking the next step.

"Our path is clear – we want to change the face of mobility and we want to be the leaders in this arena," said Schaefer. "The digital tools at our fingertips today present endless opportunities for us and if we want to continue to be # 1 in the future, we have to continue on the path of digital transformation."

Ideas presented by the nine finalists ranged from how to improve the lunch experience of MBUSI Team Members due to time constraints to how to better track vehicles in the parking lots to big data analytics.

"We purposefully left the challenges pretty vague and the rest was up to the start-ups," said Jason Hoff, President and CEO of MBUSI. "One of the things we wanted to get out of this was to see some of their out-of-the-box ideas that we wouldn't traditionally do on our own. This was a new approach for us and we appreciate everyone who pitched an idea. Unfortunately everyone couldn't win, but we saw promising results."

### **MBUSI Innovation Challenge Partners**

MBUSI, Urban Engine, STARTUP AUTOBAHN, and The University of Alabama are well-positioned to support this unique opportunity for U.S.-based innovation talent.

### **About Mercedes-Benz U.S. International**

MBUSI – located in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama – is the production location for the GLE, GLS and GLE Coupe SUVs around the world, as well as the C-Class sedan for North America. In 2017, the plant produced nearly 300,000 vehicles. MBUSI currently employs more than 3,700 team members and supports 7,000+ jobs on the approximately 1,000-acre site. In September 2017, Mercedes-Benz announced another \$1 billion investment that will equip the plant in building electric vehicles by the beginning of the next decade.

### **About Urban Engine**

Urban Engine is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that Propels Ideas Forward by empowering the next generation of thinkers, makers, doers, leaders, and founders to succeed. Urban Engine accelerates economic development through innovation education programming and by connecting aspiring entrepreneurs and established business leadership with educational resources, talent, and community.

### **About STARTUP AUTOBAHN**

STARTUP AUTOBAHN is the ultimate innovation platform that unites global young tech companies with the unrivalled tech expertise of Silicon Valley and the best of German engineering. We are a neutral innovation platform moderating an in-depth and curated collaboration between our partners from the industry and young tech companies also considering and supporting key success factors like cultural mindset change within legacy corporations. Our network of investment firms and mentors further helps the growth of tech companies. Our home is Stuttgart – the birthplace of the automobile, one of the leading IP regions of the world, and a hub of business, engineering, and groundbreaking inventions. A total of 74 startups graduated from the innovation platform with more than 130 pilot projects so far.

### **About the University of Alabama**

The University of Alabama offers a comprehensive approach toward supporting entrepreneurial efforts via a number of outreach and research centers and a culture that actively supports business development. Centers such as the Alabama Entrepreneurship Institute and the EDGE incubator and accelerator work across the University to connect student entrepreneurs with partners such as the City of

Tuscaloosa and the Chamber of Commerce of West Alabama. The goal of these efforts is to provide a framework that helps new and established businesses innovate and grow.

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