

Global Employee Headlines /

Cisco Employees Crown Clearbot

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What's in it for you?

- How you helped Cisco invest \$10,000 in the Hong Kong-based startup
- Learn how AI powers their trash-cleaning robots
- Why the Global Problem Solvers Challenge is essential for tech projects that benefit everyone



When given the choice to make a global impact, Cisco employees bet on trash.

Specifically, the icky, gooey, stinky stuff that clogs up the world's oceans and waterways.

That's the driving focus of Hong Kong-based startup Clearbot, named Cisco Employees' Choice Award winner in the fifth annual Global Problem Solver Challenge.

Recognizing the power of today's tech, Cisco launched the challenge in 2016 to inspire and empower a generation of global problem solvers to leverage technology and produce a positive impact on society.

This year's challenge offered employees their first-ever exclusive chance at playing a part in recognizing design excellence: They could review all the finalist submissions and vote for the one that they felt stood above the rest.

Mission accomplished.

In early June, you cast your vote among the 42 finalists and made your convictions known. And the plurality selected Clearbot.



Dirty problem. Clean solution

It's no secret that marine trash has become a global environmental crisis, with millions of tons of waste accumulating in the world's coastal waters.

Current industry solutions have been costly, dangerous, and inefficient, often generating more carbon waste than is saved in the cleanup effort. One of the most common methods today involves a laborer using a paddle boat and net, which can take four days to collect three kilometers of garbage.

Enter Clearbot, founded by University of Hong Kong graduates Sidhant Gupta and Utkarsh Goel, whose autonomous, AI-powered, plastic-collecting robotic solution tackles marine waste faster, safer, and cleaner.

Compared to the paddle boat method, Clearbot's swarming trash-collecting robots are 15 times cheaper to operate and remove twice as much trash daily. Its AI sensors detect and classify garbage into 64 distinct categories, which generates a wealth of data that continuously assesses and reduces the impact of marine trash.

"We created Clearbot to help communities scale their marine waste collection efforts in rivers, lakes, shorelines, and harbors while leveraging AI to generate valuable data about marine trash distribution in the process," co-founder Sidhant Gupta said.

While Clearbot robots can be remotely operated, their efficiency grows exponentially when operating autonomously, as they move back and forth across a designated area, using an onboard, AI-powered vision system to detect and collect debris. (Think Roomba for the waterways).

Clearbot had intended to conduct pilot trials for their robot boats in Indonesia last year, but COVID-19 travel restrictions curtailed their efforts, hampering the final development of their creation. The Cisco Global Problem Solver Challenge was just the event that could help get the Clearbot team back on track.

No risk. No reward



Clearbot's creators entered the Cisco competition hoping to generate awareness for their robot that could encourage much-needed financial investment for its continued refinement.

"We were really keen and excited when we entered," Gupta said. "At the time, we didn't have a lot of expectations since we were early in our mission but looked forward to the potential partnerships that we could attain" 

through the experience."

Any practical application of Clearbot will necessitate affordability for its end-users.

“One of our major aims is to drive down unit costs to ensure our product is affordable for all parties,” Gupta told a Hong Kong website last year. The goal is to reduce the price of each robot to less than \$1,000 while ensuring performance.

A game-changing announcement

Thanks to your votes, Gupta’s goal is now closer to reality with Cisco’s \$10,000 award he and his colleagues will apply to Clearbot’s development.

“We were so thrilled when we heard the news!” he said. “We desperately needed working capital to support the release of our most recent robot into the water. Cisco’s award came at a crucial time, helping us to move from early pilot to strong commercialization of the product.”

“Something that really excited us this year was to see such a high level of employee engagement in the Global Problem Solver Challenge,” said Tae Yoo, SVP of Corporate Affairs.

“Not only did we have over 175 employees from around the world volunteer as judges but we had a strong turnout in voting for the Employees’ Choice Award. We couldn’t ask for a more incredible demonstration of our employees’ commitment to supporting social entrepreneurs who are using technology for good!”

Clearbot is one of 20 different award winners in this year’s competition. To learn more about this year’s winners, visit the competition website.

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