STARTUP INCUBATOR:
PAVING THE WAY FOR AUSTRALIAN ENTREPRENEURS
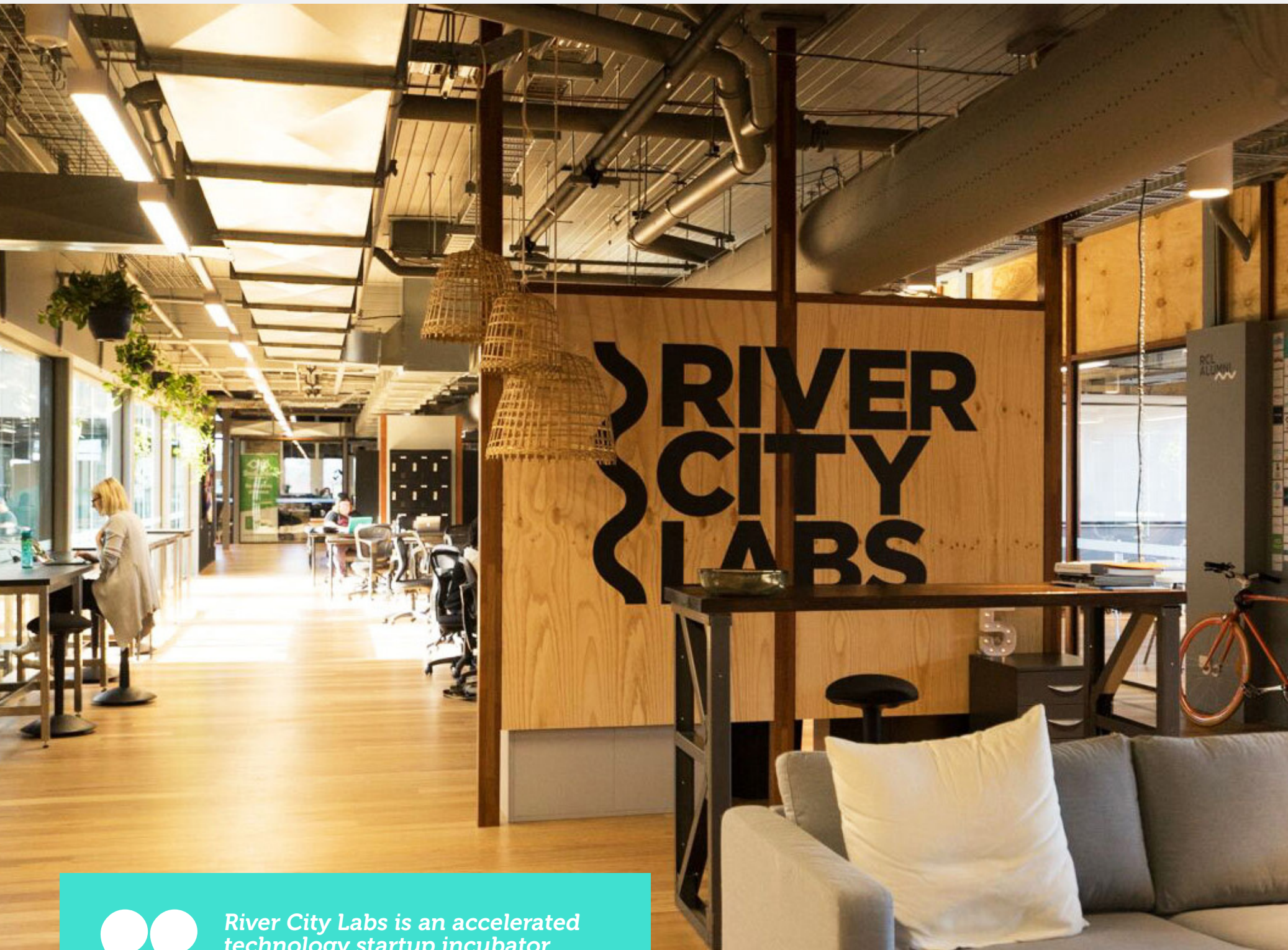
Located in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, it offers businesses in early stages of development a support ecosystem that includes entrepreneurs, mentors, lawyers, business advisors, venture capitalists, and their very own serial entrepreneur Steve Baxter of the Shark Tank fame, to evolve their concepts from a grand idea into a commercially successful and scalable business.

The perks of being a member of River City Labs are the access to the technology and space in the facility as well as the resource to attend courses on every business management topic a business leader needs to know. They will also have the opportunity to network with other like-minded individuals and investors that can propel a startup into the limelight.
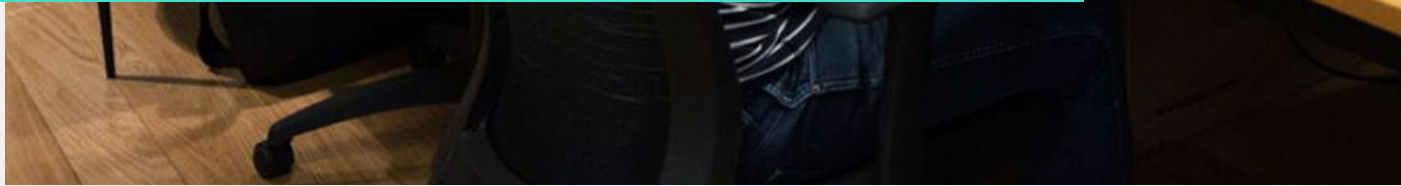
A key part of River City Labs' value proposition is the RCL Accelerator program, powered by Muru-D. This program offers promising startups a six-month opportunity to rapidly scale and prepare the business for additional funding stages, or, to develop and harness a stable customer base and revenue model. In addition to $60,000 seed funding, mentorship, workshops, and introductions to top investors and enterprises, the Accelerator program offers all of its members access to technology that would otherwise be prohibitively expensive to a startup, including server space, fast Internet access, and high speed printers.

Printers are an underestimated cost by many startups. Printing contracts, forms, and other business critical documents can quickly add up as an expense, particularly as the startup scales up and the volume of documents that it creates grows exponentially. River City Labs wanted to take away the pain involved in setting up an unfaltering print source from startups to allow them to instead focus on more important developmental and business concerns. The recognition of a need to create simplicity and reliability for their members in this continually changing and fast-paced environment was the main driving force behind River City Labs' decision to partner with Brother.

River City Labs is an accelerated technology startup incubator that fosters a co-working environment

MEETING THE NEEDS
OF A HIGHLY DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT

"Our goal is to provide everything from the furniture to the Internet, and to remove as many barriers as possible so our members can simply walk in with a laptop and get started," River City Labs CEO, Peta Ellis, commented. "Printers are an important part of that. Everyone at some point needs to print documents, and anything that we can do to make it easy on our partners so that they don't need to think about printing and can instead focus on growing and scaling a global startup. If you're noticing the printer, it's a problem. If it's seamless and you don't notice it, it's perfect."

With the move to the new Fortitude Valley office location, River City Labs decided that a refresh to its printer environment was in order. This new location is significantly larger and more spacious, offering an amphitheater to make presentations or attend meetings as well as office space for larger startups that have outgrown the communal workspaces.

Ellis said that the design of the new location was focused on keeping people working dynamically and interacting with one another. "The co-working environment is designed so that there are what we call 'collisions' or serendipitous meetings that influence members to interact with people around common areas - kitchens, event spaces and so on," she remarked. This kind of highly dynamic, energetic, and fluid environment raises some challenges when it comes to printing.

"Lots of our startups end up collaborating with one another. They might have complementary skillsets or businesses that work well with one another as partners or clients," added Ellis. "This kind of environment has been key to our own success, and has resonated with the entrepreneur community. We have around 150 individual members, and we are already at around 80 per cent capacity since moving into this larger space around six months ago."

The first challenge is that there is no consistency in what kind of technology people are using. A standard office environment will regulate whether people use Macs or Windows-based laptops, and will create policies around what tablet and phone devices a person can print from. With the entirely BYOD environment of River City Labs, the organisation needed a custom solution in order to support the various array of computers and devices that a member might bring into the office environment in any given day. The solution that serves an adaptive principle rather than applying a systematic one-size-fits-all mindset.

Another challenge was in understanding how people used the space itself, and where the movement flows would be. River City Labs is essentially an open plan environment designed around hot desking, so individuals and teams would find themselves working at different parts of the office at any time of the day. When they need to print, the intention was to minimise how far a person would need to physically walk to a printer to avoid wasting time that could be better spent collaborating or brain storming.

Finally, there was the question of volume printing, and the reliability of the technology itself. With fluctuating numbers of members in the space at any given time, and with each startup working independently, the print volumes could vary wildly depending on what and when each individual and team was doing. Having redundancy built into the printer fleet was also considered a high priority, so that if something did go wrong with a printer, there was a backup solution in place.

Ellis commented, "What makes a difference for us with technology is if members can access it without requiring assistance from us. We're in the digital technology sector so we try and be as paperless as possible - I wouldn't call us a high printing environment but there are good daily uses. What is printed is still critical; it's mostly printing business documents and contracts, and if a business can't do that, their business is materially affected."

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THE STRENGTH
OF BROTHER

River City Labs was already using Brother printers in its previous location, but took the opportunity when they expanded into their new premises to foster a stronger partnership to refine its approach in handling printing needs. Rather than simply purchasing additional Brother printers according to what they thought they might need, instead, River City Labs engaged Brother to complete a full audit and to develop a solution that would address the needs of this specific, unique office space.

"We were actually introduced to Peta and the River City Labs leadership team through Steve [Baxter] at an event that we were at, and we knew right away that we wanted to work with the company because of all the good that it was doing for Australia," Brother Commercial Market Development Channel Manager, Luke Howard, remarked. "We saw that our own innovation and skills around printing were an opportunity that could help River City Labs and its startups."

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> "Brother's background in selling retail products really equipped us with the right technology for this type of diverse working environment," Howard said. "We have taken into careful consideration that some of the users are not going to be technically skilled, which is why the simplicity of our devices is such a great benefit. We have cleaned the interface right down to make it as intuitive as possible for the consumer."

Following a comprehensive audit of the new River City Labs location and an interview process to understand printer usage, Brother recommended a mix of printer technology and strategic placements that is fit for purpose. This will help members achieve seamless redundancy in case one of the printers suffered an outage, and would be able to handle the volume of printing required without the startups facing any downtime.

The printers rolled out as a result of the solution included the MFC-L9550CDW and MFC-J6930DW.

According to Howard, the critical challenge was in making sure that Brother could achieve that complete ease of use that would make the printers very much a case of set-and-forget for all involved.

"Of course, the startups in River City Labs are highly technically literate, but it is still a BYOD environment, and no one wants to have to mess around to try and get their particular device communicating with the printer to print a critical document. The technology that we put into River City Labs needed to be connected to instantly and securely."

THE BENEFITS
OF A CLOSE PARTNERSHIP

As a result of the printer rollout, River City Labs now has access to both A4 and A3 printers, for those rare times where documents need to be printed large, and they are strategically spaced around the central hub space so that anyone can reach a printer with just a few short steps. Should one printer be unavailable for any reason, the walk to the next isn't much further away.

Furthermore, the ongoing support of the technology and Brother's deep interest in River City Labs itself, has helped the company maximise the value that it has derived from the printer investment. "The Brother team customised the printers to make it easy for anyone to find it on the network and very obvious as to where the print job was being sent – it's intuitive enough that no one could be confused," Ellis commented.

"They have also been excellent in following up to make sure that everything is going okay and whether we needed any help or further customisation. It has been a true services engagement."

River City Labs now has the printers that it needs to meet printing demand as it continues to scale its own business, fill the space completely with members, and then look for further growth opportunities. Meanwhile, for Howard and the team at Brother, being able to be part of the facilitation of the next generation of successful Australian startups has been an exciting and deeply rewarding process.

"Helping startups is good for the community. It is startups such as these that will drive job creation and inspire the next generation of entrepreneurs, so being with these businesses from the start has been a wonderful experience," Howard said. "We take part wherever we can and will be happy to participate in River City Labs events in any capacity that we can. And, when the startups that go through River City Labs are ready to strike out and set up on their own, we will be happy to continue working with them, having come to understand and catered for their unique printing needs."