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Vobile, a company owned by Yangbin Wang (center), received a 2018 Technology and Engineering Emmy Award for contributions in the area of stemming video piracy. (Photo supplied)

University of Florida Alumni Affairs

AND THE EMMY GOES TO ...

Alumnus Yangbin Wang thanks UF for shaping a career that recently included a top entertainment honor for his company
by [Carole Hawkins](#)

If someone had told Yangbin Wang (MSEE '93) he'd one day receive an Emmy award for his contributions to TV technology, it could have saved him a lot of apprehension. But in the mid-2000s, the head of a fledgling Silicon Valley startup found himself in a different kind of competition — fighting for his company's life. His business had launched two years earlier, and still, it had no customers.

It was 2007, and he was waiting for a scorecard that would show how effectively his company's technology, and that of its rivals, could identify copyrighted video streamed on the Internet. Hollywood was seeking ways to stem the piracy that threatened the film industry, and the six major studios wanted to test emerging anti-piracy technologies. Wang had entered his company, Vobile, into the competition.

“We had nothing. But we had a dream,” he says of that time. “We were climbing a high mountain full of snow.”

Wang told his team they had to score in the top three, or it would be game over. Vobile, which *The New York Times* referred to as a “no-name startup,” finished first, beating out higher profile digital fingerprinting companies. Talks with major studios, and investments from Disney and AT&T, followed.

Today, Vobile’s patented Video DNA technology is considered an industry standard. In April 2018 the National Academy of Television Arts and Sciences awarded the company a Technology and Engineering Emmy, which honors tech companies that have improved television. At the beginning of this year, Vobile launched an IPO on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange.

Back to the Beginnings

Wang earned his engineering bachelor’s degree in 1991 from Zhejiang University in China and then, left his home to seek a master’s in electrical engineering from the University of Florida. Shortly after graduation in 1993, Wang was lured to Silicon Valley.

Being so close to big-name companies and working side-by-side with other innovators was inspiring.

“I said, ‘Wow, you can actually take an idea and do something big,’” he says.

Wang worked on the front lines of an industry transformation at Compression Labs, a company that developed ways to bring hundreds of TV channels to small rooftop dishes. When a colleague began another Silicon Valley startup, Wang followed him. Later, he branched out to create startups of his own.

He launched his first company in 1999 with the prescient goal of streaming movies over the internet. The company failed.

“I was totally naïve,” he says.

Internet bandwidth wasn’t large enough yet to manage streaming, and Wang didn’t know at the time that movie distribution was controlled by copyright laws.

Ironically, one of the companies he pitched was Netflix, which at the time shipped DVDs through the mail.

He told the executives, “We have a technology that could help make you the true Netflix. Right now, you’re not Netflix, you are Envelope-flix.”

By the time Netflix had succeeded with internet streaming, Wang was already developing another niche.

He turned the idea of video streaming on its head with Vobile in 2005. The idea was to protect the movie industry from the piracy Internet streaming would bring. Vobile takes “fingerprints” of movies frame by frame and stores them in a database. Then, it fingerprints videos on the Internet, searching for any match to its database.

Within a decade, Vobile’s clients would include every major movie studio, several TV networks and even Netflix. Wang directs Vobile’s operations in Canada, Hong Kong, Japan and the United States.

‘My American Hometown’

Amid all his success, Wang has carved out time to pass on his knowledge. He funded innovation fellowships at UF and connected students with experiential learning opportunities in Gainesville and on the West Coast. He continues to advise UF on the direction of its engineering programs through his service on the West Coast Engineering Advisory Board and as a regional ambassador on UF’s National Board.

“Gainesville is my American hometown,” Wang says. “UF helped me lay the foundation of my career in the United States.”

The appreciation is mutual. Wang “is absolutely a Gator to know,” says UF Engineering Dean Cammy Abernathy.

His involvement, too, has been critical to the college’s success, she says. “His incredible work and his thoughtful guidance are helping us ensure students are prepared for the ever-evolving needs of companies in our field,” says Abernathy. “We are deeply appreciative of him and his efforts.”

Wang has been described as a man without a time zone because he's constantly traveling around the world. As he does, Vobile continues to receive accolades of every kind. Wang says the Emmy was certainly among his proudest achievements.

"It's a great, great honor," he says.