

Tru Optik Co-Founder Launches Swanston Labs

by Laurie Sullivan @lauriesullivan, August 3, 2023



The former co-founder and CEO of Tru Optik -- which was acquired by TransUnion in 2020 -- plans to once again disrupt the convergence of advertising, media, entertainment, technology, and commerce with a new venture he calls Swanston Labs (SL).

Andre Swanston says SL will focus on underrepresented entrepreneurs and help them get their startups off the ground as well as acquire early-stage startups before they raise an A-round of funding. The verticals, for now, focus on gaming, free ad supported streaming, Web3, and social commerce.

"Tru Optik was probably the most influential company when it came to audience targeting and segmentation identity in the past decade," Swanston said. "We were woefully underfunded, something commonplace for minority and female founders. It was difficult—mentally and emotionally frustrating."

Swanston knew that once he had capital of his own, he could prove success and help invest in underrepresented founders.

The business model is not structured as a venture studio fund, but rather plan to make “these investments off the balance sheet” as a company.

When I think of media and entertainment, the most growth we will see in gaming, Web3 gaming, will be transformative,” he said. “There’s also a lot of opportunity in sports -- whether leagues, technology or teams.”

Swanston said when helping to start a new company from scratch, he will limit the amount of funding in the first 12 months until the company becomes commercialized. The amount, “single-digit millions of dollars, until other capital partners are brought on.”

Ney Castro, entrepreneur-in-residence at Swanston Labs, said the ability to start a new business with immediate access to capital and support from a team of veteran executives allows me to focus on the most intimate and attention sensitive aspects of my business, without many of the day-to-day distractions that plague most early-stage founders.

SL is one part of the group of companies. Launched previously, Swanston Family Ventures (SFV) fosters diversity in start-ups. In 2022, U.S. Black founders raised an estimated total of \$2.25 billion -- or 1% -- out of the \$215.9 billion total in venture capital allocated in the U.S., according to the company.

In an effort to tip the scales, SFV actively seeks and invests in underrepresented founders, with 75% of its capital dedicated to empowering minorities and female entrepreneurs. By providing early-stage funding at the pre-seed, seed, and Series A stages, SFV aims to create a more inclusive and equitable entrepreneurial landscape. Some of SFV’s portfolio includes: Afroland TV, Bags, FitMatch, and Magpie.

Swanston Philanthropy is a \$5 million initiative established by Swanston and his wife Michelle to financially support organizations.

This initiative supports causes and organizations dedicated to make a difference. The fund donates to educational organizations like programs and schools that empower students with the tools and resources needed for success in academics and in life.