

# techstartups.com

An anonymously run technology news website that began advancing misleading and unsubstantiated claims about the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.



**Proceed with caution: This website severely violates basic standards of credibility and transparency.**

**Score: 22/100**

## Ownership and Financing

TechStartups.com does not identify its owner. The website's About Us page says it is based in the Washington metropolitan area, and the LinkedIn profile associated with the site lists an address in Westminster, Maryland. The profile does not identify an individual owner.

website's general email address, a site representative who only provided the name "Nickie" said that TechStartups.com "is owned by a retired software engineer," without identifying a specific individual.

The site publishes advertisements and sponsored articles.

- ✓ Does not repeatedly publish false content (22points)
- ✗ Gathers and presents information responsibly (18)
- ✗ Regularly corrects or clarifies errors (12.5)
- ✗ Handles the difference between news and opinion responsibly (12.5)
- ✗ Avoids deceptive headlines (10)
- ✗ Website discloses ownership and financing (7.5)
- ✗ Clearly labels advertising (7.5)
- ✗ Reveals who's in charge, including any possible conflicts of interest (5)
- ✗ The site provides names of content creators, along with either contact or biographical information (5)

## Content

The About Us page on TechStartups.com says the site's goal "is to help tech startup companies, especially the underdogs, find customers, funding, mentors by connecting them to the right investors, early adopters, decision makers and resources to grow their companies."

As of April 2020, much of the site's content had become dedicated to the COVID-19 virus outbreak. "Over the past two months, about 50 percent of our news coverage has been focused on coronavirus," the website wrote in an April 2020 article.

*Criteria are listed in order of importance.*

[More information.](#)

## Credibility

TechStartups.com's coverage of the tech industry relies on interviews with tech and venture capital firms, as well as reporting from news organizations such as CNBC and TechCrunch.

The website's 2020 coverage of the COVID-19 virus, however, has made unsubstantiated claims about the virus and misrepresented research about the coronavirus' origins. For example, a February 2020 article titled "Coronavirus May Have Originated and Escaped From China's Only Stage 4 Bioresearch Lab," said that a study by Chinese researchers "showed that coronavirus may have originated from China's Wuhan laboratory. The study, which was published in The Lancet in January 2020, detailed how the first clinical case might have originated from Wuhan laboratory."

While there is a laboratory in Wuhan that works with dangerous pathogens, the claim that the virus originated in that lab is unsubstantiated. A March 2020 study published in the journal Nature Medicine concluded that "we do not believe that any type of laboratory-based scenario is plausible." The same study also said that COVID-19 virus "is not a laboratory construct or a purposefully manipulated virus."

Another February 2020 article, titled "Coronavirus may have originated from China's Wuhan laboratory, study from Chinese researchers shows," also referred to The Lancet study to back suggestions that the virus came from a Wuhan lab.

The article then suggested that a Harvard professor who was charged with making false statements about his ties to the Chinese government while working in Wuhan was connected to the coronavirus outbreak.

"In a related story, late last month, Federal Agents arrested Dr. Charles Lieber, chair of Harvard University's Department of Chemistry and Chemical Biology, after lying to the Department of Defense about secret monthly payments of \$50,000.00 paid by China and receipt of millions more to help set up a chemical/biological "Research" laboratory in China, according to a report from the US Department of Justice (DOJ)," the article stated.

The article added, “According to DOJ, this same research professor had helped set up a lab at the Wuhan University of Technology, the same city that is now a ground zero to the potentially global pandemic.”

While Lieber was arrested and charged with making false statements about his ties to the Chinese government and the Wuhan University of Technology, his case is not related to the coronavirus outbreak. When FactCheck.org asked in a February 2020 article if there was a link between Lieber’s arrest and the COVID-19 virus, a DOJ spokesperson responded, “The Department of Justice has made no such allegation.”

In March and April 2020, TechStartups.com published multiple articles promoting an unproven treatment for the COVID-19 virus, citing claims from Dr. Vladimir Zelenko that he had treated several patients in a small upstate New York community that he had treated his patients with a mix of drugs that included the anti-malaria drug hydroxychloroquine.

A March 2020 article titled “Dr. Vladimir Zelenko provides important update on three drug regimen of Hydroxychloroquine Sulfate, Zinc and Azithromycin (Z-Pak) he used to effectively treat 699 coronavirus patients with 100% success [UPDATE 3],” repeated Zelenko’s claim that his treatment resulted in a “100% recovery rate with normal breathing restored within 3-4 hours and no intubation.” The article added, “Dr Zelenko statistics – 699 cases / 0 deaths = 0% death rate.”

The evidence provided in the TechStartups.com was from videos posted on social media by Zelenko, who has not shared data or published a study to support his claims. In a March 2020 interview with the Jewish news organization the Forward, Zelenko acknowledged “that his regimen was new and untested, and that it was too soon to assess its long-term effectiveness.”

International health authorities have not concluded that hydroxychloroquine, which is used to treat malaria and rheumatoid arthritis, is a proven treatment for the

COVID-19 virus. Some early studies have suggested that it could be effective, such as a March 2020 study by French researchers who tested the drug on 20 people. However, another March 2020 study conducted in China found that the drug was not more effective for 15 COVID-19 patients than a regimen of bed rest, supplemental oxygen, and antiviral drugs for another group of patients.

Dr. Anthony Fauci, the leading infectious disease specialist in the U.S., commented on hydroxychloroquine in an April 2020 interview on CBS' "Face the Nation," saying that "the data are really just at best suggestive. There have been cases that show there may be an effect and there are others to show there's no effect. So I think in terms of science, I don't think we could definitively say it works."

In another March 2020 article promoting Zelenko's COVID-19 regimen, TechStartups.com said that "a study conducted by the National Institute of Health (NIH) also confirmed some of Dr. Zelenko's findings. The study by NIH showed that Zinc supplementation decreases the morbidity of lower respiratory tract infection in pediatric patients in the developing world."

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the website promoted a misleading claim about a different virus in a March 2020 article titled "Is hantavirus the new coronavirus? A man in China dies from hantavirus, over 1,000 cases now reported." The article stated, "While everyone is busy talking about coronavirus, there is a new virus outbreak coming out of China. The virus is called hantavirus."

While Global Times, a newspaper owned by China's communist government, did report the death of a man in March 2020 due to a hantavirus, there was no outbreak associated with it. Hantaviruses are a family of viruses mainly spread by rodents, and while it is possible for humans to be infected by a rodent, human-to-human transmission is rare, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The TechStartups.com headline misleadingly stated that following the hantavirus death in China, “over 1,000 cases have now been reported,” but the article itself said those cases occurred between 2015 and 2019, before the man’s March 2020 death.

Because TechStartups.com has promoted misleading claims related to the COVID-19 virus in its articles and headlines, and the site itself has said coronavirus coverage has become a significant portion of its content in 2020, NewsGuard has determined that the site fails to gather and present information responsibly and does not avoid deceptive headlines.

TechStartups.com did not address specific examples of misleading content on the website in an April 2020 email to NewsGuard. “Our articles on coronavirus and hydroxychloroquine are not based on opinions, but instead based on video interviews many of the doctors had with others. We also posted the link to the video,” the site’s representative said. “We are ready to defend all the articles on the site.”

TechStartups.com does not post a policy explaining how it corrects errors. The most recent correction found by NewsGuard on the site was in January 2018, which does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for regularly issuing corrections.

TechStartups.com does not have a dedicated opinion section. However, articles on the COVID-19 pandemic, published in the site’s News section, have often included opinionated statements.

A March 2020 news article, titled “Coronavirus Panic: What the media is not telling you even if COVID-19 mortality rate is 3.4%,” stated, “So, it appears that the number of potential US deaths from COVID-19 will be a tiny drop in a large bucket of seasonal viral illness. That truth is buried deep in the middle paragraphs of the lying media’s fake news reports festooned with hysteria-inducing headlines.”

The site has also included opinions about hydroxychloroquine in news articles. An April 2020 article said, “Even as the mainstream media, such as NY Times and Washington Post, continue to suppress the good news about hydroxychloroquine, numerous reports have shown the drug to be highly effective against COVID-19 virus and saved many lives around the world.”

antimalaria drugs Hydroxychloroquine (HCQ) and Azithromycin as potential drugs for the treatment of coronavirus. However, the do-nothing FDA and CDC have failed Americans by failing to work with researchers in Europe to offer alternatives therapies to treat COVID-19 patients.”

Because articles in TechStartups.com’s News section have regularly included opinionated statements about the COVID-19 pandemic, NewsGuard has determined that the website fails to handle the difference between news and opinion responsibly.

TechStartups.com’s emailed response to NewsGuard did not answer questions about the site’s approach to corrections and its lack of separation between news and opinion.

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#### Transparency

The website does not disclose its owners or disclose who is in charge of its content. Articles are generally only credited to “TechStartupsTeam,” and the website does not publish a staff directory. A general email address is provided on the Contact Us page.

The site’s representative did not answer NewsGuard’s questions about the website’s lack of disclosure of owners and editors, and lack of information about content creators.

TechStartups.com does not differentiate between advertising and editorial content. The Advertise page lists product reviews, crowdfunding campaign promotions, and press releases as options for advertising on the site.

“We offer both paid and free press releases and product reviews,” the site representative told NewsGuard.

“Finally, unlike major news outlets, we’re not doing this full time. Again, our primary goal is not about generating revenue but to help the underdog tech startups not featured in major tech blog sites like TechCrunch.”

While the site does not explain the financial arrangements for these advertising options, because the website identifies them as advertising, and because none of the articles mentioned are identified as paid content, NewsGuard has determined that TechStartups.com does not meet NewsGuard’s standard for clearly labeling advertising.

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#### History

The site launched in 2016.

*Editor’s Note: This Nutrition Label was updated on April 15, 2020, with comment from a website representative.*

**Written by:** [John Gregory](#)

**Edited by:** [Amy Westfeldt](#)

**Send feedback to NewsGuard:** [Click Here](#)

## Sources

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#### Ownership and Financing

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Credibility

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Transparency

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History

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