

STUDENT STARTUP MADNESS

Collegiate Digital Media Entrepreneurship Tournament



WalkBack mobile app team wins Student Startup Madness kick-off pitchfest at SXSW 2012

Student startup that helps college friends get home safely impresses judging panel of entrepreneurs, investors and recent student startup founders

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WalkBack, a venture of University of Virginia students Duylam Nguyen-Ngo and Ashutosh Priyadarshy, is the winner of the Student Startup Madness (SSM) kick-off pitchfest at the South By Southwest Interactive conference. Multi-university teams with students from John Brown University, Syracuse University, Trinity University and the University of Texas-San Antonio took second and third place.

WalkBack is a personal safety mobile app targeting college students that helps friends walk each other home late at night. WalkBack enables friends to sync their smart phones with one another and then check each other's safety status and location; it also provides valuable data to campus authorities and gives students quick access to emergency resources.

"All five teams did a great job describing their product or service and answering questions from the judges, but the top teams really stood out with their understanding of their market and articulating their business model," says Sean Branagan, SSM founder and director of the Center for Digital Media Entrepreneurship at Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. "The WalkBack app got the attention of the judges because it solved a growing problem on many college campuses."

The WalkBack team won a prize package valued at more than \$3,000 from prize sponsors Funny or Die, JackThreads/Thrillist, Startup Debut and genConnect. The team also earned a further conversation with kick-off pitchfest judge Brian Cohen, chairman of New York Angels (<http://newyorkangels.com>).

Cohen was joined on the judging panel of entrepreneurs/investors/student startup founders by his son, Trace, president of Launch.it; Elisa Miller-Out, president of Singlebrook (<http://singlebrook.com/>); and Nancy Spears, president of genConnect (<http://www.genconnect.com/>).

"I was impressed with the quality of the student startups that presented at SXSW," says Miller-out, "and I look forward to seeing what new ideas emerge as the competition continues at universities across the country."

Each of the five student digital media entrepreneurship teams selected to compete in the SSM kick-off pitchfest was given 15 minutes to give an in-person pitch and respond to questions. The judges assessed the business merit and investment opportunity of the students' ideas, based on the strength of the idea, the strength of the team, market size and market traction.

Second place was awarded to the Craftistas team (from John Brown University and Syracuse University). Their concept involves offering pre-assembled craft kits through a subscription website, <http://www.craftistaskits.com>.

The StrideSync team (with students from Trinity University and the University of Texas-San Antonio) took third place. StrideSync is a mobile app-based fitness social network that enables individuals to work out with each other by analyzing compatibilities within their music preferences, athletic abilities, proximity and schedules.

The kick-off pitchfest was the launch event for the 2012-13 Student Startup Madness nationwide tournament (<http://www.StudentStartupMadness.com>), organized by Syracuse University in association with South By Southwest. The online entry period opens in summer 2012, followed by regional events at host universities across the country in fall 2012 and culminating in the national finals before a celebrity panel of well-known entrepreneurs, venture capitalists and investors at SXSW Interactive in March 2013.

Each round of the nationwide tournament will build momentum, awareness and social media buzz, drawing attention to colleges and universities as sources for innovation, entrepreneurship and talent while showcasing outstanding university entrepreneurship programs and encouraging college students to start businesses.

Opportunities are available for sponsorships and for university regional host sites for the 2012-13 tournament. For more information, contact Sean Branagan at startups@syr.edu.

The Student Startup Madness kick-off pitchfest was sponsored by Syracuse University, the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, C3 Strategic, The Paley Center for Media, Crossborders.tv, JackThreads/Thrillist, genConnect, Startup Debut, Singlebrook Technologies, Funny or Die, and Gust.

Student Startup Madness is on Facebook: www.facebook.com/StudentStartupMadness

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