

University of Ottawa Wes Nicol Business Plan Competition 2011 Report

We held what turned out to be the toughest-ever-to-win U of O Wes Nicol Business Plan Competition yesterday. What a fantastic event. On behalf of the University, our student entrepreneurs and myself, I wanted to thank Wes Nicol so much for his continuing and generous support for what we do.

This year, the six Wes Nicol Business Plan finalists went through a grueling process: they competed in the Elevator Pitch Competition (done in association the Entrepreneurs Club) then our Business Model Competition (done in association with Explorim.org) and, finally, the top six teams went on to compete in the Wes Nicol.

One of our judges, Ryan Anderson, Canada's leading Social Media guru, who has some knowledge in the matter, said these six student entrepreneur groups were, by far, the best EVER. I would also like to thank Kyle Lester from HSBC and Todd Jamieson from Envision Online for agreeing to be judges this year.

Honourable mentions went to:

ShiftBase, a unique solution to staff scheduling issues for medium sized and large enterprises. Shiftbase also provides a forum for employees to trade shifts between themselves. This group of student entrepreneurs was led by Ms. Sabrina Lesage.

Beaconize, an innovative social marketing agency using a competition based engine to drive brand recognition and engagement. It traverses both RL (Real Life) and the Internet as well as harnessing the new power of social commerce (aka collaborative commerce). This group of student entrepreneurs was led by Mr. Franco Varriano.

AddressIt is a service to resolve problems with address changes for large enterprises such as credit card issuers, Banks, telecom companies and others. The firm also provides a new mission for Canada Post Corporation and the US Postal Service in terms of address verification and it has an important role to play in less developed nations in terms of giving people there access to the modern economy by providing them with a permanent, verified, fixed address. This group of student entrepreneurs was led by Ms. Allison Chen.

3rd Place (Bronze Medal) winner:

Platon score. This group has developed a method to scale CO2 emissions. What you can measure you can change and the objective is to give people a way to actively engage and lower their CO2 emissions. This applies to individuals and businesses. Unlike other CO2 services, the Platon Score shows you how to *actually* go about lowering your CO2 emissions by, for example, showing you that by buying a different vehicle and/or moving closer to work, your score can drop by X%. This group of student entrepreneurs was led by Mr. Matthew Conley.

2nd Place (Silver Medal) winner:

Vertigrow. This group evolved a business model that allows medium sized and large enterprises to add vertical gardens to their workspaces to reduce workplace illness and improve workplace productivity. This group of student entrepreneurs was led by Mr. Duane van Gaalen.

1st place (Gold Medal) winner:

Therma Tech. I wrote this today about this startup:

“The idea of using a thermal battery is not new—folks used to cut ice in the winter, pack it in sawdust and enjoy cold drinks and fresh food all summer. Therma Tech is taking this concept and applying it to heating and cooling homes and commercial buildings using an innovative, inexpensive thermal battery that has been proven to work—the Diefenbunker, in Carp, Ontario, which has a similar type of thermal battery, hasn’t needed a heating or cooling system for nearly 50 years,” Professor Bruce M. Firestone, B. Eng. (Civil), M. Eng.-Sci., PhD.

I believe that Therma Tech is an enormous opportunity to lower fuels bills for heating and cooling by as much as 85% over the next generation and I think we are going to hear a great deal about Therma Tech over the next decade and more. This group of student entrepreneurs was led by Mr. Patrick Trahan.

In my view, any one of these groups could have won and I am proud of the work these young people did. I also believe that all six plans are viable and I expect to see these new enterprises joining the many other successful startups that have gestated from this program. I am also so pleased that the groups are made up of both engineers and business students in a multi-disciplinary effort to create Canada’s future.

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