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Young entrepreneurs

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Golf cart minibars, African hemp production and downloadable textbooks.

Those were just a few of the business ideas 20 Utah State University students presented Wednesday during the school's annual eDay elevator pitch contest.

The event gave participants two minutes to convince 12 entrepreneurs that their concept deserved start-up cash.

And it wasn't just an exercise.

The first-place winner walked away with \$5,000, while second received \$2,500 and third \$1,000. Fourth, fifth and sixth places were worth \$500.

After two rounds of tense competition, business information systems student Ryan Shaw emerged on top.

The senior presented his plan for TxtUcate, a computer program that would allow professors to text quiz questions to cell phones and instantly see the class' scores.

Shaw and his partner Randy Merrill have already developed a working prototype and hope to "have it on every campus in the nation within two years."

The \$5,000 will boost that effort, going mainly toward marketing expenses and Web hosting.

"This will really help," Shaw explained. "It's the most money I've made in one day."

He credited solid preparation for his win, saying he rehearsed for several hours in front of his roommates, going over each sentence and even practicing hand gestures.

With only two minutes — about the length of a typical elevator ride — to present the concept, every word had to be right.

Shaw was doubly busy as the only participant who presented two ideas.

His second concept — CleanMyDVD.com, an online DVD editing system, garnered fourth place.

The busy budding entrepreneur is working on both business plans simultaneously, along with an already-established Web development company called Ep.iphano.us.

With his focus squarely on graduation and life after textbooks, Shaw felt that eDay provided invaluable real-world experience.

"Don't tell my professors this, but eDay was worth more than my whole semester," he said with a laugh.


Third-place finishers Josh Kerkmann and **Joseph Irvine** agreed.

Both called the results a "confidence booster" that will keep them working on their business, Lottery Solutions, which provides computer systems to randomize charter school lotteries.

That's exactly the kind of reaction eDay founder Gary Anderson likes to hear.

The Farmington businessman started the event in 2006 to give students an opportunity to test their plans with the experts.

"The end result, I hope, is an unforgettable one-day experience that sparks new ideas and builds within these students an entrepreneurial spirit that will help them find success after graduation," he said.

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