

Entrepreneurs compete in Start Norfolk 3

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Paul Chin Jr. came to Start Norfolk 3 with barely an idea.

He left the weekendlong business symposium Sunday, where groups pitted their startup idea against others, with a road map for the future.

"Before Friday, I had nothing prepared," Chin said. "Now I think we can have it up and running in a month."

Start Norfolk 3 was designed to bring together entrepreneurs, engineers, developers, designers and businesspeople in a competition to produce a new startup business in a weekend. The winners, announced late Sunday at Innovation Research Park at Old Dominion University, received a cash prize and other support, said Zack Miller, founder of Start Norfolk.

The makers of Hiqualia, a technology that monitors copyright infringement, won first place in the competition. Coming in second was 7 Cups of Tea, a website that connects people to other people willing to listen to them. Sound Sense was third, with a technology that would better allow the deaf to communicate by installing a wall outlet that would convert sounds via a transmitter.

"With the sequestration here, we want to help build startup businesses," Miller said.

Start Norfolk held its first symposium 16 months ago. It has grown from 150 people with 38 ideas at the first event to more than 400 people pitching 65 ideas at Start Norfolk 3, he said.

Chin's idea combines couponing and geocaching into an interactive video game. Restaurant customers would log into a mobile website from their phone or tablet while ordering their meals and select one of the "games" available that would tell them certain menu items to order. Once the customer had ordered the items, the restaurant staff would validate that he or she had completed the mission on a website, earning the customer a coupon and experience points in the overall game against their friends.

"As you gain experience points you receive achievements," Chin said. "You're trying to get the most points."

Shawn McDonald, founder of Feedback and another finalist, pitched a golfing app that would analyze a golfer's swing and then offer tips on how to improve it.

The mobile app, which McDonald is designing for iPhone and other devices, would come with a small stand to hold the device. The camera in the phone would then record a golfer's swing and compare it with a professional golfer's swing, providing the feedback via Bluetooth.

McDonald said she had the idea while at a driving range a year ago and pitched it at a previous Start Norfolk event. Winning Start Norfolk would have been a big boost getting the app off the ground, she said.

"It's the difference between us hiring two people or 20 people," McDonald said.

Steve Hackbarth also pitched an idea at a previous Start Norfolk. He didn't win, and he says the judges made the right decision because his idea had no real business model. He was at ODU Sunday helping out, but he still works on his app.

"The idea is if you play guitar or sing, you can give it one line or lyrics and then the site writes the rest of the lyrics and sheet music," he said.

Hackbarth's idea might not have a great business model, but it does have a great name - Jon Bon Robot.

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