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Teen entrepreneurs create a winning app

By [RICHARD CLOUGH](#)

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Rafi Caro and Michael Karahalios have an award-winning app idea that they are now looking to turn into a business.

Not bad for two kids who haven't even graduated from high school yet.

This month, the pair of 16-year-olds won the business plan competition at the Teen Entrepreneur Academy, an annual summer camp hosted by Concordia University for business-minded students. Their winning idea revolves around an app to help fans connect with up-and-coming artists who gained popularity through YouTube and other nontraditional

channels.

"We're revolutionizing how talent is going to be marketed in the entertainment industry," Caro said. Like a seasoned businessman, Caro declined to elaborate further on the plan, citing a confidentiality agreement he signed when the camp began.

Caro and Karahalios, both about to begin their junior year at San Clemente High School, are now using the \$1,000 first place prize money to help turn the idea into a business.

Officially, the app is in the incubator stage. Stephen Christensen, an entrepreneurship instructor at the university and founder of the academy, has helped assemble a group of advisers and said he talks to the teenagers daily about issues such as setting up billings-collections systems, designing a website and pitching clients.

Christensen said he is enthusiastic about the idea, which could open previously unexplored revenue streams for lesser-known artists. For instance, the app could help fans purchase memorabilia.

"It is taking the social media and creating ways to monetize it," he said.

Christensen said he got the idea for the Teen Entrepreneur Academy about two years ago when he read about a study showing that many high schoolers hope to start their own companies and would like to receive more education about business.

"Eighty-five percent of high school students in America indicated that they wished they had more business education," he said. "The idea came to me: Why don't I just do a summer camp then?"

The academy runs for about one week each summer. Now in its second year, the camp hosted about 65 students this month. In addition to several out-of-state students, attendees came from Santa Ana Valley High School, Corona del Mar High School and other local schools.

The program costs about \$500 for room and board, but the fees can be waived for students with financial hardships. Christensen said the goal is to include about half of the attendees each year from lower-income areas.

During the week, students visited local businesses and heard from guest speakers, including Yogurtland

founder Phillip Chang and Northwood Advisors founder Myron Weber. Christensen said a Google Inc. executive gave the kids a demonstration of Google Glass.

The camp culminates with the business plan competition. Christensen said he asks each student to sign a confidentiality agreement so that they can freely share business ideas without worrying about someone else stealing those ideas.

Christensen said many of the pitches are technology-related, such as one group's proposal for an app that would disable messaging capabilities when a smartphone is in motion – an idea intended to cut down on the dangerous habit of texting-while-driving.

Christensen said he hopes the camp gives attendees "a much deeper appreciation for what it takes to run a business."

"They're all there because they want to know how to start a business," he said. "We're trying to instill in them a free-enterprise, self-responsibility mind-set."

The camp made an impression on Caro. He said he learned a lot about entrepreneurship and called it humbling to have professionals critique his business plan.

A promising musician, Caro said now that he has a promising venture in the works, he might just have found a future career in app development.

"I would be happy to keep doing this," he said.

Contact the writer: 714-796-7922 or rclough@oregister.com

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