



30 semifinalists named in Minnesota Cup business plan competition

By Graeme Thickins



I attended and Twittered a bit at a reception last week at the grand, old James J. Hill Library in downtown St. Paul. (You remember old J.J., don't you, the Bill Gates of his era?) It was an event to honor the startups who made it to the next round of the Minnesota Cup, an annual, statewide competition that seeks out aspiring entrepreneurs and their breakthrough ideas.

The 30 lucky semifinalists were selected from a record 840 entries in this fourth — and largest — year of the competition, and will vie for prizes that include \$50,000 for the first-place winner. An interesting tidbit I picked up at the reception: about 10 percent of the 840 entrants were Web 2.0-related.

Scott Litman, co-founder of the event, told me the competition this year was the toughest ever, and that many plans that might have made the cut in previous years didn't. He also told me that, unfortunately, many entrants may have had great business concepts, but they were not understandable — the submissions were either poorly written, or riddled with so many acronyms and buzzwords that the judges flat-out did not know what the heck the submitter was talking about. (So, take heart, rejectees. You may be great at selling your ideas verbally — now work on the written word.)



Here's how the Minnesota Cup site states its mission: *"We're looking for the next great entrepreneurial success story in our state. This competition is for all entrepreneurs, whether your breakthrough idea is high tech or no tech, whether you are just putting your ideas into a business plan or if you've been out building your venture."*

Well, I wonder if it's possible that any who entered, and especially the chosen semifinalists, could really be "no tech" in this day and age? That would be hard to imagine. And, in looking over the list, there's nary a one that would seem *not* to rely on technology in their businesses. (Although some without a website certainly have the aura of no-tech at this point, perhaps awaiting prize money to build? And what's with all the student semifinalists being listed with no websites?) As for the lack of a requirement that the business be new, i.e., that older startups can also apply, I know at least two on the list are four to five years old and still chasing \$50k. Ah, hope springs eternal. Here's the full list:

Minnesota Cup 2008 Semifinalists (Team Leader — Entry Name)

Delmar Dehn, [Achievance, Inc.](#)
Gerardo Ruiz, [An Effortless Shift to Solar](#)
Steve Sahl, [Barrier1 Network Security Appliance](#)
Rick Diamond, [Breathe Laser Therapy](#)
Kelly Lucente, [Bye Bye Monster](#)
Tim Eaton, [Canoeing.com: The Ultimate Guide](#)
Christine Horton, [CoreSpine Technologies](#)
Amy Noble Seitz, [Exhibits Development Group](#)
Robert Carr, [Fruchi — the Vital Energy of Fruit](#)
Craig Mack, [GlowSkin Active Illumination Systems](#)
Deborah Brister, Hope Fish CompanyJohn Bjelland, [Infobionics: a Cellular Database Management System](#)
Amy Lyon, [Izzy Bell Advanced Baby Monitor](#)
Elli Ansari, [Klondas Foods: Fibre and Beyond](#)
Alex Huff, [loudclick.net — build websites together](#)
John Dinnusson, Medical Device for Osteoarthritis using EMT2
Dawne Brown White, [Molar Express Minnesota](#)
William Solboe, [Music Mayhem Online Gaming Network](#)
Sue Kruskopf, [MyWonderfulLife.com](#)
John Freund, [Nabbit](#)
Shawn Rankin, [Perfect Fit Health](#)
Robert Ziebol, [Pursuit Medical LLC](#)
Joseph McEriane, [Putting the care back into Healthcare](#)
Slade Smith, Quick Mold Test
Jessica Netter, Rear Window Media Recoups Consumer Fuel Costs
David Struyk, Somnatek — Innovative Snoring Solutions
Julian Reytel, [SuddenDeals.com](#)
Jon Norris, [The Future of Location-based Marketing](#)
Adam Sellke, [Tunebloom — let music grow](#)
Tom Roering, [Wilcraft](#)
Matt Bartel, [YouRankIt.com](#)

OK, let's see, we have medical devices and health care (no surprise here in Minnesota) ... food (hey, everybody eats, right?) ... death (but no taxes) ... music (is there a more disrupted business out there?) ... radio (see music) ... local news media (did I mention disruption?) ... babies (oh, cute) ... snoring, mold, fish, canoeing, energy savings. Oh, and marketing and IT, too. How's that for a lineup, friends?

Minnesota Cup 2007 Student Semi-Finalists:

Kyle Henderson, HowThree — The Next Generation of How-to
Eric Severson, Power-2-Go: Next-Generation Laptop Power Supply
Brian Limborg, Sirkl
Shyam Sivaramakrishnan, Wireless respiratory carbon dioxide sensors
Jonathan Pearce, Zipnosis

The Judges

So, who was it that culled down this list of 840 applicants to 30? A "review board of local business leaders" is how it's stated, though the group also includes several sponsors, association and government types, and the two founders of the event. It also includes some investors in startups, angel and otherwise, who get a free, early look at a fire hose of deal flow. These individuals will select the five finalists of the Minnesota Cup after reviewing the second-stage plans submitted by the 30 semifinalists — though the exact way they do that is not explained. (A simple up or down vote by each judge on each company?) This "review board" will choose the winner from among the five finalists after listening to them present their plans orally. Review board members are:

Dave Cleveland — co-founder, Riverside Bank

Leslie Frecon — CEO, LFE Capital

Art Fry — 3M corporate scientist (Retired), inventor of Post-It Notes

Skip Gage — chairman and CEO, Gage Marketing Group

Morris Goodwin — president and COO, The Hogan Co.

Michael Gorman — managing director, Split Rock Partners

Sima Griffith — founder, Aethlon Capital

Fred Haberman — president, Haberman & Associates

Gary Holmes — president and owner, CSM Corp.

Joel Lebewitz — partner, Lurie Besikof Lapidus & Co., LLP

Brad Lehrman — managing general partner, Portage Equity

Investments II, LP, and Partner, law firm of Lommen Abdo PA

Joy Lindsay — president and co-founder, StarTec Investments, LLC

Scott Litman — co-founder, Minnesota Cup, and managing director, SDWA Ventures LLC

Dan Mallin — co-founder, Minnesota Cup, and managing director, SDWA Ventures LLC

Dan McElroy — commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED)

Shawn McIntee — partner, Maslon

Mike Moore — director, William C. Norris Institute

Jay Novak — editor/publisher, Twin Cities Business

Debra Paterson — regional president, Metro MN Community Banking Wells Fargo & Co.

Doug Ramler — principal co-chair, Entrepreneurial Services Group, Gray Plant Mooty Law Firm

Sam Richter — chief executive of SBR Worldwide and SVP/chief marketing officer at ActiFi

Thom Sandberg — founder, The Kenyon Consortium

Dale Wahlstrom — CEO, The BioBusiness Alliance of Minnesota

Jessica Zeaske — associate director, Venture Center, University of Minnesota

Student Judge: John Stavig — director, Carlson School of Management, Entrepreneurial Studies

The Next Steps

The semifinalists now have about one month to work on their semifinal entries, which are due July 25. The review period for these semifinal entries is three weeks. The Minnesota Cup finalists will be announced Aug. 20. The finalists then have two weeks to prepare for their oral presentations to the review board. The Minnesota Cup Awards Event will be held at the University of Minnesota's McNamara Alumni Center Sept. 11. Yes, that date. If I want catch it, I'll have to fly back that day

after covering both the DEMOfall and TechCrunch50 conferences in California, back to back. It will be interesting comparing our state's latest crop of promising startups to those from elsewhere in the country.

Watch for coverage of some of the MN Cup semifinalists on Minnov8 in coming weeks and months.

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