

Ideas keep flowing for 2009's student winner

BY NANCY DAHLBERG

ndahlberg@MiamiHerald.com

Jake Nolan and his business partner developed an iPhone application for study flashcards that sold in 82 countries.

Reinvesting the profits, they are expanding the business, creating a website that will offer not only flashcards but also social networking for collaborative learning.

For the iPhone app Flash-Me, which allows students to create their own flashcards or browse others that are available for hundreds of subjects, Nolan and Maruika Wei won last year's Business Plan Challenge student competition.

Since then, there's been no time for Nolan to rest on his laurels — or sleep.

With a couple of other partners, he also flipped a fashion blog for a decent profit and is launching more blogs.

"I'm always working," Nolan said.

At age 17, he's already a serial entrepreneur, and his business partners are classmates at Gulliver Preparatory School.

Until recently, the Flash-Me app was hosted on Cramberry.net. "When we found success, we said, 'Let's launch our own site.' It is in beta [testing] but when it is done it is going to be a hit," Nolan said.

Now with their SnapStudy.com website, Nolan and Wei are expanding their market.



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No longer just for iPhone users, the flashcards can be used by anyone with a Web browser.

A key advantage over competing sites will be social networking. "No one likes to study alone. That's why we have study groups," said Nolan. "And study groups are a very effective way to learn. That's what we are bringing to the computer."

As Nolan explains it, when you sign up for the site, it will ask if you are a student or teacher and for your school affiliation. Students can click on their class, study with flashcards, create cards, network with classmates or ask teachers questions. Teachers can create cards too and see the areas in which students are having trouble.

The site will be free for students. Revenue will come from the iPhone app, which will soon be synched with SnapStudy.com, and through ads on the site. Another revenue possibility: partnerships with schools.

"This is something I am ecstatic about,"



CHARLES TRAINOR JR./MIAMI HERALD STAFF

DETERMINED TEAM: Jake Nolan of Gulliver Preparatory won the Challenge for Flash-Me, a flashcard app. Now he also creates blogs with classmates. From left: Nolan, Cecilia Emden, Giulia Berrebi and Mauricio Espinosa.

said Nolan. "... It's wonderful when you develop something and you have people e-mailing you saying, 'Wow, this saved my life for my Spanish exam.'"

Thousands of users have already signed up, with big concentrations coming from the Tallahassee and Tampa areas as well as South Florida, Nolan said. "It's all word of mouth marketing right now," he said.

Nolan keeps a hectic schedule, starting at 7 a.m. with a bootcamp workout. Then he has school, homework, club work and time devoted to business. Some nights he takes a Miami Dade College class. On the weekends, he spends quality time on business planning. When there was just a little lull in SnapStudy development a few months ago, he was "a little bored" and started PartyPeopleFashion.com with friends Mauricio Espinosa and Giulia Berrebi.

The end game on the fashion/lifestyle/travel blog was to sell it. So three months into it, they put it on the market and netted \$600 — not a bad return since the site cost just \$6 to host on GoDaddy and \$6 for the domain name.

Nolan, Espinosa and Berrebi plan to start another fashion blog. And just a week ago he and friend Cecilia Emden decided to launch an advice blog, created by teens for teens. It's so new they haven't named it yet.

"All my blogs are made to be sold. The layouts are meant to be modified simply, which makes it very attractive for purchasers," Nolan said.

Nolan is graduating a year early. In the fall, he heads to Syracuse University where he has been accepted into the entrepreneurship program. "I think there I will really be able to grow my businesses," he said.

The second and third place winners in the Business Plan Challenge student competition also submitted plans to create technology-oriented products for the student market.

While Dagoberto Ruiz and Chris Dass have not yet tried to develop businesses, they submitted creative, innovative ideas that have solid market potential, the