

COOLEST COLLEGE STARTUPS

America's Coolest College Startups 2014

For the sixth year running, Inc. spotlights the nation's top startups taking campuses by storm.



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IMAGES: Courtesy Companies, Courtesy Company

Not long ago, people would call college "kids" who started businesses quaint. Now they call them the boss.

Helped in part by low-cost technologies and an increased prevalence of entrepreneurship training at the university level, college students--and indeed those even younger--are making solid strides at founding companies. And they're not just launching local pizza shops and fashion boutiques. They're starting up businesses that could scale into much bigger companies and may already cater to a national audience.

Here, we give you proof: *Inc.*'s 2014 top college startups. Picked from a list of nearly 100 college startups across the country, these 16 companies are the cream of the college

entrepreneurship crop. Their ideas span a variety of industries, from mobile applications to subscription boxes and cosmetic-product makers.

Their founders may be young, but the companies are already making significant strides--from earning revenue and seed funding from the likes of Y Combinator and Mark Cuban to cultivating celebrity clients. Additionally, these 16 winners were chosen on the basis of factors including originality, pitch (which we left mostly intact below), and growth potential.

Here, in alphabetical order, is *Inc.*'s 2014 list of the 16 coolest college startups. To cast your vote for the coolest college startup, among this list of 16, check out *Inc.*'s March Madness-themed tournament. The winner will be announced on April 8.

1. Applits



Founders: Keith Shields and Joshua Tucker (Both 22)
University: Ohio State University
Launch Date: 2012

The Pitch: "Applits is working to increase the accessibility of the complex mobile application industry to everyday people with brilliant app ideas, in the form of a monthly app idea competition. Each month, people from around the world submit their app ideas to Applits during our submission phase. During the last week of the month, we hold public Voting Week. This is when the entire community comes together to vote on their favorite ideas that were submitted that month, and tell us what app they want us to create next. A single winning app idea is identified, and the submitter of that winning idea is awarded 15 percent of the profits that the app brings in after we develop and release it (free of charge, of course, for the submitter)."

Traction: Applits has successfully launched nine mobile apps resulting from the platform, and has 11 more under development. Its new website will allow Applits

members to give feedback and ideas in all stages of app creation, including feature refinement, naming, icon design, and more--virtually every decision along the way.

2. AthleteTrax



Founders: Jon Halpern, Brian Gross, Rey Coriano (All 22)
University: George Washington University
Launch Date: 2012

The Pitch: "AthleteTrax aims to make scheduling, communicating, and fundraising a cinch for team sports. The cloud-based tool is initially targeting the large and growing collegiate club and high school competitive market. We have more than 100 teams and more than 2,000 users, representing more than 30 schools and 16 sports on our platform. We are now focused on rapidly expanding our base of teams.

"Our business model is freemium with a focus on two transactional revenue sources: purchasing of team goods and services through national partnerships and collecting dues payments or other expenses via credit card with a small service fee. The team consists of former high school, collegiate, and professional athletes, creating the perfect combination to lead this sports technology company."

Traction: AthleteTrax, which declines to disclose revenue, came in second place out of 144 teams in George Washington University's business plan competition. The company won \$21,000, and went on to raise \$185,000 from angel investors and an accelerator, AlphaLab, to build out the product and acquire its first paying customers. It is raising a

seed round of \$500,000, with \$100,000 committed primarily for sales and marketing to help the company achieve its next milestone of serving 1,900 teams in the seven million U.S. team-management market by the end of 2014.

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3. Beatmerch



Founder: Duncan Abdelnour (22)
University: University of Tampa
Launch Date: 2013

The Pitch: "We synchronize the merchandise needs of internationally touring electronic music artists and events. We provide a full-circle merchandise solution, including tour and festival merchandise stores, e-commerce solutions, licensing, and promotional product distribution."

Traction: Beatmerch, which has grown over the past nine months to be one of the largest merchandising companies in the electronic music space, represents renowned DJs including Hardwell, Nicky Romero, Paul van Dyk, DJ Snake, Don Diablo, and DOCO. The company earned \$126,000 in sales last year.

4. Cavebox



Founders: Storm Anderson (22) and Samuel George (27)
University: Indiana University
Launch Date: February 2014

The Pitch: "We serve men ages 18 to 30 with a convenient and cost-effective hygiene solution. Men, or women shopping for men (think parents), come to TheCavebox.com and customize a one- to two-month supply of hygiene for as little as \$25."

Traction: In the first week, Cavebox sold five Caveboxes and obtained more than 50 signups for its spring-break Cavebag (travel-size hygiene essentials for the man on the go). The company anticipates sales of \$10,000 in its first year.

Additionally, the idea for Cavebox will be featured as a case study in Spine Sweat, a nationally recognized entrepreneurship course at Indiana University. Spine Sweat aims to put ambitious student entrepreneurs in front of investors for seed and angel financing opportunities.

5. FiscalNote



Founders: Jonathan C. Chen, Timothy Hwang, Gerald Yao (All 21)
University: University of Maryland/ Princeton University/ Emory University
Launch Date: 2013

The Pitch: "FiscalNote's mission is to unlock government data and make it useful. Whether legislation, regulations, or court cases, all this information is in the form of unstructured data and we aim to clean it up. We aggregate government data across all 50 states, D.C., and Congress. We run advanced machine learning and natural language processing algorithms to find useful trends relating to the government data and present it to our clients through beautiful visualizations.

"Additionally, using our proprietary machine learning and algorithms as well as advanced statistical analysis on all past legislative data, we are able to predict whether new bills will pass into law after they are proposed with roughly 90 percent accuracy."

Traction: In 2014, FiscalNote, which declines to disclose annual revenue, raised a seed round of \$1.2 million from Mark Cuban, New Enterprise Associates, First Round Capital Dorm Room Fund, and Yahoo co-founder Jerry Yang's AME Cloud Ventures. Advisers include Y.S. Chi, chairman of Elsevier; John Suh, CEO of LegalZoom; Sheel Tyle, NEA associate; and Alec Ross, the former senior adviser for innovation to former Secretary of

State Hillary Clinton.

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6. Golden Gear



Founder: Daniel Goldberg (20)
University: Syracuse University
Launch Date: 2009

The Pitch: "When I was 11 years old, I threw my first jab, cross, hook combo and instantly fell in love with combat sports. But constant injury kept me out of the game. In 2009, working with world-renowned fighters and trainers and consulting with an orthopedic hand surgeon, we developed a full range of protective combat equipment that is now used by hundreds of pro fighters and several world champion fighters.

"Even fighters who have paid sponsorships by other leading brands still choose to use our gear over their paid sponsors', because they love our products. One glove at a time, we will help fighters train safer, smarter, and better! By 2020, we will be the leader in the combat sports industry by helping fighters train safely and maximize their performance."

Traction: The company, which touts world-renowned ultimate fighters as customers, has more than doubled its sales, to \$110,000, in the past year.

It has outfitted Ultimate Fighting Championship fighter Ryan LaFlare, among others.

7. Keen Home



Founders: Ryan Fant (age 29) and Nayeem Hussain (31)
University: New York University
Launch Date: 2012

The Pitch: "Keen Home builds proactive hardware devices that aim to enhance the core functions of the home, so your home can start to take care of you. For our first product, we are focusing on a home's heating and cooling system.

"The average U.S. household spends 50 percent of its energy bill on heating or cooling, or about \$2,000 per year. This same household has an average of two to four rooms that are overheated or overcooled at various times throughout the day. To solve this problem, we have developed the Keen Home Smart Vent.

"The Smart Vent is a wirelessly networked air vent that intelligently opens and closes to redirect airflow throughout the home. This not only increases comfort on a room-by-room level, but also reduces the run time of heating and cooling systems by up to 30 percent, resulting in a potential payback period of one year."

Traction: Keen Home is pre-revenue, as it's still in the design and early manufacturing stages. But the Techstars accelerator member plans to begin overseas production this summer, with product ready to ship and be on store shelves in September or October. Keen received a \$15,000 grant from New York University to test its Smart Vent in a few of the student residences this spring. Keen also ran a successful crowdfunding campaign on Indiegogo, where it surpassed its funding goal of \$40,000. The company has recently

signed distribution agreements with giant companies such as Lowe's, ADT, and SmartThings.

8. Notefuly



Founders: Mark Peterson (30), Cameron Smith (30), Taseen Peterson (28)
University: Seton Hall University
Launch Date: 2009

The Pitch: "The three-man team behind the TapFactory set out to create a mobile application experience that would be as fun and easy to use as the paper sticky note. Enter Notefuly, a mobile application and cloud service that bridges the gap between the traditional, physical sticky note and the digital world."

Traction: Notefuly (formerly Sticky Notes) has been downloaded more than four million times, and has generated more than \$450,000 in sales. It also just took home the top prize at this year's SXSW startup competition.

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9. ProfilePasser



Founder: Samantha Weber (21)
University: Grove City College
Launch Date: 2012

The Pitch: "As a collegiate athlete, I (founder Samantha Weber) know firsthand how much sports can help prepare a person for a successful career. Student-athletes learn about hard work, time management, and leadership all from playing a game they love. Unfortunately, the college athletic recruiting process is broken, and thousands of talented athletes are being completely overlooked by college coaches.

"ProfilePasser hopes to solve this problem with its athletic recruiting app that connects high school athletes and college coaches on the field. Last semester, ProfilePasser was one of nine startups accepted into Pittsburgh's leading accelerator, AlphaLab, and I completed the program while taking a full academic schedule and playing my final varsity soccer season."

Traction: Though still pre-revenue, ProfilePasser has raised more than \$25,000 and is in the process of raising a seed round of funding. The company launched its app in September and now has more than 600 users. In addition, ProfilePasser has a partnership with the Club Champions League in Maryland and Virginia. In February 2014,

the first soccer player was recruited after using the app at a showcase tournament. Finally, ProfilePasser has a star group of advisers, including Weber's sister, Alexa Andrzejewski, who is the founder and CEO of Foodspotting, which sold to OpenTable for \$10 million last year.

10. Pufferfish Software



Founder: Megan Holstein (18)
University: Ohio State University
Launch Date: 2011

The Pitch: "Our apps are designed to bring the conveniences and advantages of iPads and personal technology to the lives of those on the autism spectrum. They assist in applied behavior analysis therapy and teach autistic children in a measurable, replicable way. The goal is to aid their growth and relation with the outside world, modeling traditional ABA therapy techniques with the design and quality of modern-day apps and software.

"We believe in creating software that gives individuals with autism spectrum disorder and their caregivers the most fulfilling experience with the outside world using mobile technology and software. Additionally, we sponsor iPad giveaways and scholarships for autistic children, as well as provide information on how to acquire an iPad to parents of autistic children.

"The founder started Pufferfish when she was just 15 years old by hiring a contractor on the Internet; they worked together to produce the apps out on the App Store. She now goes to OSU, but the team is still working together on oDesk.com every day to bring these apps to reality. Our mission is to remain a small, virtual company that can interact with anyone around the world, as we have been doing since Day One."

Traction: Pufferfish reports just \$8,000 in annual revenue, but the apps have received renown. The company received support from organizations such as the Autism Society

of Ohio, Apps for Children With Special Needs, and GRASP.org, a national partnership for Asperger's.

11. Revita Ink



Founders: Nolan Simons (21), David Raskin (32), Archi Prudencio (30)
University: Loyola Marymount University
Launch Date: 2013

The Pitch: "Revita Ink is a unique skin care line designed specifically to help prevent fading and loss of color in tattoos and permanent makeup. We are first movers in the anti-aging/beauty market for tattoos. All products are approved by a board-certified and award-winning dermatologist in Los Angeles. We are partnered with a tattoo modeling agency to boost traffic and have daily sales across the U.S. and around the world--most notably in London, New Zealand, Australia, Italy, Japan, Canada, and the Philippines. Remember to revitalize your ink with Revita Ink!"

Traction: The five-person company rang up just \$10,000 in its first year of business. But of those customers, the company reports a 20 percent repurchase rate. Plus, Major League Baseball players and recent world champions Jonny Gomes and Mike Napoli of the Boston Red Sox are fans.

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12. Scholly



Founders: Christopher Gray (21), Nick Pirollo (23), Bryson Alef (21)

University: Drexel University/Amherst College

Launch Date: 2013

The Pitch: "College is expensive, forcing students to take out thousands of dollars in student loans in order to foot the bill. As a result, many students are drowning in student debt. This has made many students and parents turn to scholarships and grants to pay for college education. The only problem with these scholarships, however, is that they are notoriously hard to find. Students are either forced to scour the Web or use websites that give them a list of thousands of scholarships they may not even qualify for.

"Created by students, including Christopher Gray, who won \$1.3 million in scholarships, Scholly is a mobile app for iPhone and Android devices that gives students a fast and simple way to find scholarships for college. Scholly uses eight specific parameters--such as state, race, GPA, or major--to instantly filter listings into a comprehensive directory of scholarships for which the prospective applicant is eligible. Users can quickly sift through the tailored results, save a list of scholarships, and export it to themselves via email in order to apply online."

Traction: In addition to the app, which has netted the company \$50,000 in annual revenue, the company allows schools and businesses to bulk purchase Scholly for students. Recently, Drexel University made a bulk purchase for its students.

13. Strados



Founder: Nishanth Samala (21)
University: Illinois Institute of Technology
Launch Date: February 2014

The Pitch: "Strados is an app that helps people understand what their car is saying. Using the Translator, a Bluetooth-enabled, low-energy device that plugs into a car's diagnostics port, Strados translates a car's data into emotions, colors, and text to describe its health and how it is doing. If something goes wrong, Strados analyzes the issue and comes up with solutions along with cost estimates and severity ratings to make sure a driver is armed with the proper knowledge when getting the car fixed.

"Over time, Strados learns more about your car and preemptively warns the driver before systems are about to fail on a car. Because it works with any car made after 1996, Strados is helping bring the connected car platform to a wider audience in a very friendly, relatable, and human way."

Traction: Strados is brand new, but it plans to release its limited beta app onto Google Play at the end of the month. It plans to ship beta versions of the product in late March or early April. And it's already in the process of developing a second version of its hardware (the Translator LE). On the first day of the Chicago Auto Show, however, the company says it broke even on preorder sales and signups.

14. Suneris



Founders: Joe Landolina (21) and Isaac Miller (23)
University: New York University
Launch Date: 2012

The Pitch: "Suneris prides itself in utilizing scientific ingenuity to solve complex problems with hopes to better society. Using the body's natural hemostatic mechanisms (the process through which bleeding stops), Suneris is able to mimick the extracellular matrix to initiate the cascading effects that go along with hemostasis.

"The product, called Veti-Gel, is a plant-based polymer gel applying the techniques listed above to initiate hemostasis more rapidly than the products of competitors. Hemostatic agents found in today's market take up to five minutes to stop bleeding. Veti-Gel accomplishes this in just a few seconds.

"The company looks to market Veti-Gel to veterinarians starting in the summer of 2014. Leading up to the summer, Suneris is attending veterinary conferences while also finalizing further research to assist in the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's approval process. Suneris plans to enter the military market beginning in 2015, and hopes to one day have its Veti-Gel product on the belt of every soldier."

Traction: Suneris has opened a manufacturing lab in Brooklyn, New York, and is now looking to start commercializing its Veti-Gel product.

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tournament!

15. Try the World



Founders: Kat Vorotova (28) and David Folt (25)

University: Columbia University

Launch Date: 2013

The Pitch: "Try the World sources the best gourmet products from around the globe. Members subscribe and receive a box from a different country every two months at home. The global journey starts with the essence of enchanting Paris, lures you through the silhouettes of pagodas, and captivates you with Rio's samba beats--all through mouthwatering gourmet products matched with local music, film, and culture tips.

"With many an undiscovered location waiting within your mailbox, there's no telling where you might find yourself next. When money and time don't permit travel, Try the World brings travel to your doorstep. Boxes cost \$45, with free shipping and the option to cancel anytime."

Traction: The company anticipates reeling in \$400,000 in revenue in its first year of operations--without spending a dime on marketing. It's also in the process of raising a seed-financing round.

16. Wink Natural Cosmetics



Founders: Megan Cox (21) and Miguel Salinas (22)
University: Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Launch Date: 2013

The Pitch: "Wink is dedicated to solving women's toughest beauty problems with real science and natural ingredients. By working with your natural lash and brow growth cycle to stimulate growth in dormant follicles, Wink aims to help strengthen the lashes and brows you already have.

"In testing trials, Wink was shown to increase eyelash fullness by up to 20 percent (60 lashes) in 100 percent of participants. Additionally, eyelashes increased up to 20 percent in length, owing to Wink's conditioning effects. Wink was also shown to regrow eyebrows in patches where brows had previously stopped growing because of overplucking. Wink is hypoallergenic, minimally processed, and free of parabens, prostaglandins, hormones, phthalates, sulfates, GMOs, synthetic fragrances, and synthetic dyes."

Traction: After ringing up \$80,000 in its first seven months of business, Wink expects to launch its second product (a brightening and anti-aging cream) this fall. The company

was also featured in the December 2013 edition of Glossybox and GlossyMag.

-Special thanks to the following entrepreneurship groups: The College Entrepreneurs' Organization, Empact, and the Young Entrepreneur Council.

PUBLISHED ON: MAR 17, 2014