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Inspiration + Presentation: GSB Student Captures R.I. Elevator Pitch Contest

Senior management major Willem Delventhal pitches business plan for interactive greeting card service

December 8, 2014 | Alexandria Wojtanowski ‘15

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – An up-and-coming mode of sending out personal sentiments to friends and loved ones may cause you to discard altogether traditional notions of “greeting cards” – at least if Willem Delventhal, a senior management major in the Mario J. Gabelli School of Business, gets his way.

Evidently it’s a convincing idea. So much so that Delventhal earned honors as top presenter at the ninth annual statewide Elevator Pitch Contest, sponsored by the Rhode Island Business Plan Competition, for his proposal to create an online greeting card service that enables recipients to interactively engage in a one-minute game with senders.

Delventhal – an East Haddam, Conn., native who is minoring in web development and computer science – said the service, called Nuanotes, will offer a customizable video experience that gradually reveals the intended message as the recipient plays the game. For example, Delventhal offered, a birthday greeting card might include a cake assembly game.

Inspiration for the business plan emerged over the summer when a close friend of Delventhal moved to India. Because the friends are both programmers, rather than write a goodbye letter, Delventhal thought the most fitting send-off should be coded. He created a game that featured characters delivering farewell messages to the friend.
With help from GSB Professor W. Brett McKenzie, representatives for the Elevator Pitch Contest heard about the campus club founded by Delventhal, the Tech-Es (or Technical Entrepreneurs). They invited club members to enter the contest, hosted in Providence by the startup accelerator Betaspring. Already armed with a working prototype – his original inspiration – Delventhal signed up. Up against 25 other presenters, he had 90 seconds to present his idea to a panel of eight judges, who then gave verbal feedback about the clarity and persuasiveness of the pitch.

Delventhal walked away from the presentation with not only the top prize, but feedback from judges and a clearer course of action. Over winter break, he plans to continue developing the technology for his project. Next steps include devising a marketing plan, building a website and creating more cards.

“For customers, it’s going to be a really simple and silly thing – a customizable and unique experience.” Delventhal plans to open the website for business in the next year.