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New businesses are sowing the seeds for success

Two innovative new businesses set up by entrepreneurial students have jointly won the top award in Northumbria University's Business Challenge competition.

Now in its tenth year, the competition was open to all students and recent graduates who have a business idea or have recently begun trading.

Competition judges faced a tough decision choosing between Green Digit Gardening's environmentally friendly SEEDCELL product and Moltin's

ecommerce software. After long deliberations the judges couldn't separate the two and the top prize was awarded to both companies.

Green Digit Gardening was set up by Design for Industry graduate Dan Robson after working on placement in a plastics packaging factory. He realised that packaging could become part of the product to help to reduce waste. Inspired by 'guerrilla gardeners' who find unused land and plant seeds to make it more aesthetically pleasing, Dan began to develop his SEEDCELL seed germination system.

The SEEDCELL is made of recycled packaging designed in the shape of a pizza, with seeds inserted into each 'slice' of the packaging. By using the thin tip of the pizza-style slice to push the seed into the soil, the SEEDCELL eliminates the need to use gardening tools.

The packaging is fully biodegradable and also retains water, ensuring that the germinating seed can be fed without being over-watered. Since graduating last year, Dan has worked on developing the business and is now selling his SEEDCELLS at more than 35 retail outlets, National Trust Shops and at the Eden Project in Cornwall. He is also in advanced talks with national department stores. Dan said: "I've had a huge amount of support from Northumbria's Student and Graduate Enterprise scheme, which has really helped to accelerate the growth of the business. Thanks to their advice and guidance I am now working towards supplying larger retail chains, scaling the business up by going into mass production and I'm also starting to look at spin-out products."

Founders of Moltin ecommerce, Jamie Holroyd and Adam Sturrock, met when working together at a web development agency and witnessed the frustrations of working with ecommerce software.

They began to develop their own ecommerce platform which would allow developers to work in any programming language on any device. Completing the Ignite technology accelerator programme has helped them to raise funds to develop their business – which has already garnered impressive testimonials from clients giving the pair high hopes for the future.

"We want Moltin to be the go-to platform for all things ecommerce," said Jamie. "I studied Computer Science and was able to take a module which focused on the business aspects of the tech industry. There was a real career

focus – I learnt how to prepare business plans and financial reports which allowed us to secure investment.

“Although I graduated in 2010, I have maintained a relationship with Northumbria and our company has received a great deal of support from the University. They have helped with legal advice and on general issues you face when setting up a business.”

Third place winners were Neda Vazharova and George Genov’s business, GoBright, a thermoelectric candle lamp solution. Highly commended titles went to first year Graphic Design student Tyler Kearney who uses vintage clocks and watches to create upcycled jewellery for his company Scogs Jewellery and Conor O’Hare, who sells high-end candles through his business, White Paris Luxury Candles.

Lucy Winskell OBE, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Business and Engagement at Northumbria University, said: “This is the tenth year of the awards and the standard of entries has been extremely high. Many past winners have taken their ideas forward and have gone on to create successful businesses.

“Northumbria is committed to developing the entrepreneurial and enterprising skills of our students. We provide wide-ranging support to help our students and graduates to maximise the potential of their business plans and continue this through the start-up process and beyond.

“To date, Northumbria’s graduate start-ups have a combined turnover of £54 million and employ almost 800 people, with the vast majority based in the North East. These figures are significant to the North East economy and further reinforce why we are committed to supporting our students and graduates with their business ideas, and why we were recently rated the fourth best university in the UK for our ability to establish start-up businesses.”

Dan Robson added: “The more that people find out about the great work and support that the University’s Student and Graduate Enterprise team do, the better. I wouldn’t be where I am today if it wasn’t for them.”

For more information about Green Digit Gardening visit www.greendigitgardening.com For more information about Moltin visit

molt.in For more information about how the University supports students and graduates to start-up their own businesses visit www.northumbria.ac.uk/sgenterprise

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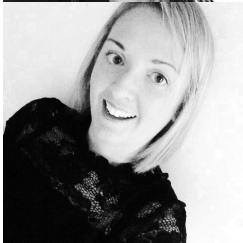


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