

Startup Weekend Auckland 2015, and the winner is...

By Mike Blythe

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Just recently the Auckland segment of Startup Weekend was held in Wynyard Quarters The Grid. Spark Ventures employee Mike Blythe was one of the 7 people from Spark to participate in the event and pitch their Startup concepts. Mike took a moment to reflect on his frantic weekend at Startup Auckland.

He writes: Friday night was all about throwing ideas against a wall to see what sticks. The idea I had was to display art in public spaces and this art could be rented or bought by the public. There were 41 initial 1 minute pitches. After all the initial pitches were done we had hustle other participants to join our team and try and get the right type of people to join. The mentors stressed how important it was to pick the right team. Some people naturally gravitated to me, others took some convincing; soon we were a team of 6. 41 ideas were quickly whittled down to 12 and mine was one of them!

Our team members: Helen, Jordan, Neff, Greg, Ali and myself.

That night we were thrown in the deep end and quickly learnt the concepts of a lean startup business model. After some early feedback from the pestering mentors, we realised that the best place for people to see these artworks would be places that they frequent – cafes. We filled our [lean canvas](#) with post-its, and drew up a to-do list to attack Saturday head on.

Saturday was an emotional roller coaster and I found myself asking 'What am I doing here? This isn't fun', but the regular status updates helped us realise that we weren't alone in the sea of startup insanity. We had a few problems with some team

members not being very motivated. After a quick pep talk and some 'Ganbatte!' war cries (the Startup Weekend catch phrase which means 'Keep trying!' or 'Don't give up!') combined with fist-pumps, we were all swimming in the same direction.

We realised that we had too many focuses – the buyer, the cafe owners, and the artists. We decided to focus on the buyers. What was their pain point?

We went out and did some further validation and found that people thought that art was too expensive and inaccessible. We had to change the model. What if instead of selling original art worth \$500+, we could sell prints worth \$50 – \$150? We had a vote and started looking at how this new cost structure would work.

We created a plaque with a QR code that would link to the product on our website whereby the customer can order the print in the size they desire and have it delivered directly to their door.

The organization of the event was fantastic. SW helpers came around like little elves delivering celery and carrot sticks to our tables, making sure we stayed nourished. All meals were catered for, and they were delicious! Paiyela, burritos, Totos metre long pizzas, the perfect fuel for creative idea generation.

After a few trial runs of the pitch, we were advised to weave a story into our pitch. We had a lot of laughs giving Joe, our fictional art buyer a back story. Joe liked to sip Americanos with a shot of Frangellico at cafes in Ponsonby.

The pitch along with the slides went through about 6 revisions, with all of us chipping in to get the wording and imagery just right.

Sunday, 5.30pm. Final pitches. The atmosphere is electric. Nerves are raw. The camera crew is everywhere capturing the

emotion of all the hard working teams. The competition was tough. After the second pitch I thought “There’s no way we could top that!”. Stand your ground, be strong – ‘Ganbatte!’.

We are 6th on the lineup pitching to 3 very experienced judges. Lillian Grace – CEO of Wiki New Zealand, Roy Shera – Partner at Lowndes Jordan and our very own Rod Snodgrass – CEO of Spark Ventures. Helen speaks with eloquence and poise and there are thankfully no technical difficulties. The judges question our cost structure and the printing process – we have the answers. Phew.

While the judges are deliberating their decision, the mentors hand out fun awards to all the teams and we have a good laugh. There’s a light bulb award to the team developing an app to find a personal city guide – it dawned on one of their team members late in the event that a relative of theirs was in the tourism industry. Another team got a dart board – they battled to find their target demographic.

When the judges finally return, they give each team positive comments but also useful feedback. We listen intently. And then the awards. Runners up goes to Anchor Up – basically AirBnB for boats. Great idea. First place goes to... Artfé! We’re stunned. WTF!! Seriously?!

All in all it was an incredible experience. The mentors were incredibly supportive. Sometimes their advice was a bitter pill to swallow; often it contradicted the advice of another mentor, but it was left up to us to navigate the correct course. Every detail of the event was planned and executed literally to the minute. Hats off to the SW team for putting together such a well organised event.

Would I do it again? **Hell yeah!**

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