

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

To: Jeffrey Epstein <jeevacation@gmail.com>

Subject: Fwd: The 11 winners of the LAUNCH Festival 2015 (and why they won)

Date: Mon, 09 Mar 2015 13:54:56 +0000

Fun to read

Co-authored with iPhone auto-correct

Begin forwarded message:

From: Jason Calacanis <[REDACTED]>

Date: March 9, 2015 at 5:16:15 AM PDT

To: <[REDACTED]>

Subject: The 11 winners of the LAUNCH Festival 2015 (and why they won)

Reply-To: Jason Calacanis <[REDACTED]>

We just finished up a marathon three days at the LAUNCH Festival here in San Francisco. We had 11,700 folks registered and thousands in the audience for three packed days, across two stages.

This year we truly tipped over from a 'conference' (what we called the event for the first four years) to a Festival (what we've called the event for the last four years).

50 startups competed on stage and there were 11 winners. In this email I will explain why they won, in my opinion.

Important note on judging: There are six members of our Grand Jury at LAUNCH. They see every single presentation and pick the winners. I am not part of the Grand Jury. As the event has grown to include "The Incubator" and the LAUNCH Fund, we have decided that companies we have invested in via these two entities are disqualified from winning the top prize. This seems only fair to us!*

Abra

Overall Winner

[REDACTED]

<http://youtu.be/gr0kKwbMs5o>

Bitcoin has suffered because no one has created a killer app for it -- Abra just did. Their BHAG is to create "human ATMs," who are essentially Uber drivers with cash. You give a person in Los Angeles cash and they send it to a "human ATM" (HATMs) in Mexico. Those HATMs get to take a percentage of the transaction that they set. That percentage is transparent, so a marketplace will emerge, driving fees down and increasing performance (just like the rating system and UberX vs. Uber Premium dynamic). The key to all of this is that Abra NEVER holds the money. Instead, it uses bitcoin to move your money around the world. If you lose your phone, you lose your money (small risk, big upside is not using Western Union).

Recurrency

Best Incubator Company

<http://youtu.be/OwVqvNYZAxI>

Recurrency allows you to give a \$1 or more donation per week to anyone on any social network -- even if they don't ask for it! This week I gave Howard Stern's wife Beth O. a \$1 per week donation because she rescues bulldogs, and Mark Cuban a \$1 per week for being a badass. They would never set up a Kickstarter, and they don't need the money -- but I want to thank them in a small way every week, knowing that they will pay it forward. I hope Beth directs her \$1 per week to the Twitter handle of a great organization, and that Mark forwards the \$1 per week to someone who he thinks makes a great impact on the world. This idea is crazy, big and hard... which is why the Grand Jury LOVED it!

PreHire

Best Hackathon

<http://youtu.be/DR6LH6Yfg2I>

A number of the projects out of our 48-hour hackathon were better than the ones on stage, and in fact two of them were among the top 20% of the entire Festival!

PreHire is a service which allows you to train and test potential employees. It was a very, very slick product and investors were jotting down the name and hovering around the founders, which is always a good sign.

REscour

Best B2B

<http://youtu.be/et3I61eQtMk>

Zillow and Trulia have rocked the housing market for years, but no one has ever built a commercial real estate product with the same amount of polish -- until now. Many felt REscour should have won the event, but since I invested in the company already we eliminated them from contention of the top prize. As one investor explained it to me, only time will tell if REscour, which is certain to have early success, is a bigger hit than Abra, which has smaller chance of success but much more upside.

VideoStitch

Diamond in the Rough

<http://youtu.be/w4pGrV2lByA>

A couple of years back Gigi Brisson, one of our long-standing Grand Jury members, created this award for the startup which was early in its development but that showed massive potential. While VR is certainly exciting, most of it is pre-recorded. VideoStitch creates a tool to let you "pop up" a virtual world at your sporting event, concert, or conference so folks can navigate around it live.

Could be a major game changer.

Fiskkit

Social Impact

<http://youtu.be/RxWEsGF-OG8>

Despite the name, which elicits a double-take after hearing it, Fiskkit is a very important product for the era when everyone has a voice, but can't tell who has authority. This tool allows you to take any document and annotate the arguments and facts within it (think Straw Man, opinion, etc.).

The product went from clunky and not very well-designed, to slick and impressive during our rehearsals. We believe it has massive potential to help with debates like gun control and Black Mirror.

OneDrop

Best Design

<http://youtu.be/erYwAIH4Ktc>

Many felt this was the best product of the LAUNCH Festival, but because I had invested in it they couldn't win the best prize. Despite that, they did have -- clearly -- the best design of any product at the festival.

OneDrop is a complete system, from hardware to testing strips to App, for those suffering from diabetes. It's clever, slick, and powerful. The founder, Jeff Dachis, was the founder of Razorfish and has diabetes -- so this is personal for him.

Detectify

International Startup

<http://youtu.be/Hrni1BAhRsg>

My partner in crime Tyler Crowley always brings me a couple of interesting startups from Europe, and Detectify was the most impressive of all time. It's a security monitoring tool that is well designed, simple, and powerful.

It's a snap purchase decision.

MixMax

Demo Pit

http://youtu.be/_0LG5J5PgR4

Every year we grab 8-12 startups from the DEMO PIT and throw them on stage for two minutes each. Most of the presentations are poorly done and the products tend to be hit or miss.

That wasn't the case with MixMax, which was a slick way to make embedded widgets in your Gmail. In fact, MixMax was in the top 20% of all of the startups at LAUNCH, proving once again that our selection process is not perfect (in fact, far from it). The DEMO PIT is designed to help us reverse mistakes we make in selection (i.e., we can see how they do over 2-3 days with the public).

Fountain

Best 2.0

<http://youtu.be/69dcN3iRV0U>

Aaron Patzer won the first LAUNCH Festival with his startup [REDACTED], which he sold to Intuit for a staggering nine figures back in 2009. He came back with a slick App called Fountain, which lets you ask for help from experts over your phone. He calls it microconsulting, but the judges called it impressive.

Rise Robotics

Best Hardware

http://youtu.be/r6Pa_y8sgLE

Another startup pulled from obscurity at the Festival, Rise Robotics came to us by an angel investor friend in Boston name Bill Warner (he created Avid, yes that Avid). He brought the company to the event at the last minute and we were so impressed we gave them a demo pit table. The Grand Jury was so impressed they gave them a slot on stage.

The audience was so impressed that we had no choice but to give them our Best Hardware award.

In conclusion

Thanks so much to my hard-working team, our tremendously supportive founders, and the 11,700 people who joined us for the world's greatest startup event. We couldn't have done it without everyone's support and we're closing in on our goal of hitting 25,000 attendees by 2025.

Sorry to have missed two weeks of blogging, but I was exhausted from the LAUNCH Festival and promise I will make it up to y'all! Two per day blog posts coming!!!

best, @jason

[* Additionally, we've seen the other startup event out there come under heavy fire in the industry because they picked their host's startup to win for the past five of five years. Over time this has lead to quality startups choosing our event over that event -- as well as the fact that our event is four times larger and we don't charge the startups money. You can read about this controversy in Business Insider [<http://goo.gl/ZSasM7>], [The Guardian](http://goo.gl/heiOy6) [<http://goo.gl/heiOy6>] and [Valleywag](http://goo.gl/4tgLYU) [<http://goo.gl/4tgLYU>].

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