

The new crop

For a seasoned farmer, nothing is more rewarding than seeing seedlings poke through the soil. That small sign of growth can make all of the long hours and grueling work worthwhile, even if most people enjoy the finished product without thought of how it came to be.

Just as seeds grow with hard work and nurturing, so do startups. This year's Rollins Center crop has faced the up-and-down battle of finding the best places to plant, tilling the soil, weathering the storm, and finally seeing growth and an upcoming harvest. Though the path to success can be grueling and long, the new crop of companies has what it takes to make it to the harvest.

Planting the Seed

Before a farmer can plant, he must first prepare the field. Without investing significant time to make sure the field is ready for planting, the farmer won't see as successful of a harvest.

Farmers can create a better breeding ground for their seeds by adding materials such as compost to ensure their crops are planted in nutrient-rich soil. Similarly, startups can have greater success by utilizing additional resources. OmniEarth founder Joseph Walker knew he had good soil with his idea for an organic fertilizer made of worm manure, but he needed to add an understanding of soil science to his business knowledge.

Joseph spent three thousand hours researching and creating the formula for his fertilizer by traveling and touring farms and greenhouses, researching best practices, and even getting a part-time job as a soil lab assistant. Joseph went from not having any

knowledge of soil science to creating an organic formula that is unlike anything else on the market. The extra time it took to gain knowledge, or prepare the field, before starting his business allowed the startup seed to truly take root and grow.

When choosing a seed, farmers need to consider if what they are planting is in season. If a business idea isn't in season or there isn't a need for it, it will likely face difficulty growing and could lead to struggling crops when harvest time nears. FaiRepair founders thought they had a viable crop with their first idea of a third-party mechanic service that involved local mechanics bidding on jobs. However, research proved that the idea wasn't of interest to mechanics, so the team moved on to its next idea—an app to help car dealerships communicate with customers on the progress of their vehicle's repair. That seed also faced difficulties. It wasn't until the third seed of an antifraud camera system for service departments that the team found something that was in demand—or a seed ready to be planted. With the right seed, the work finally took root.

Beginning to Sprout

Once the seeds have been planted, the work to grow a sustainable crop begins. Plants must be watered on a regular basis before they can grow. Just like a farmer waters his crops for days before sprouts start to appear, entrepreneurs must water their business crops before they know if anything will grow. That water often takes the form of adding team members, testing ideas, creating prototypes, and selling through grassroots efforts.

By Michelle Kaiser



Left ▶ The Khione SHEL hammock cover.

Sometimes farmers find things growing that they didn't even mean to plant. Graduate engineering students Caleb Lystrup and Casey Messick weren't planning to start a company when they entered their SHEL hammock cover in the Student Innovator of the Year competition. But after coming in first place, they planted seeds in a successful fundraising effort and now lead a rapidly growing outdoor company, Khione Outdoor Gear. The team began to see things sprout when they launched a Kickstarter campaign, hitting their original goal within two hours and gathering more than six times their original target in just 30 days. With the seedlings sprouting strong, Lystrup and Messick could move forward to manufacture their product and get it in the hands of eager backers and customers—all from a seed they didn't expect to plant.

As seeds start to sprout, weeds often develop. Removing weeds that take away resources and nutrients from the real yield is vital to the success of any crop. Removing weeds allows the rest of the crop to flourish. Venga founder Lee Chang's original business idea was to create a screening app for landlords, similar to a dating app, but he had to weed out that idea after realizing that it was

Right ▶ Matthew Liddle of TrashTalk takes a hands-on approach with his startup.

taking away from the more robust crop of an app to buy and sell housing contracts. Although casting aside his original idea was difficult, Lee learned that letting go can lead to something bigger. The success and scalability of Venga would never have been possible without his original seed.

Facing the Storm

Sprouting crops are often exposed to the elements, and sometimes, those elements force the farmer to make difficult decisions about the future of his crops. TrashTalk, a trash can sensor company founded by Matthew Liddle, faced a storm after the planned business model of selling to waste companies didn't pan out. Matthew thought it would be easier to sell to these companies, but he realized he had to keep exploring his options. Instead he decided to sell to waste consultants, who were eager to use the sensor technology to save money and increase efficiency. Matthew's sensors are now in a growing number of public trash cans and dumpsters operated



by trash consultants—a demographic he wouldn't have been targeting with his original selling strategy.

Skilled farmers know there isn't one path to success and that the best ideas often come through trial and error. Teeth-whitening subscription service Dentium Club faced storms as it experimented with marketing solutions and pricing strategy. Founder Peter Gallagher wasn't sure what groups to target and what messages to use to successfully sell his service. Through trial and error, he found the best approach to reach the right customers.

By pivoting the messaging from a vanity beauty service to a professional-level experience, the group has been able to nail down messages that resonate with customers, and the crop survived the storm to continue to grow. The solidified pricing strategy that matches the target audience has allowed the company to get in front of potential customers using more effective strategies, including influencers and video and blog content.

Seeing Growth

As crops are nourished and sprout, the fields bloom and can be seen for miles. For storage company Neiybor, nationwide growth has naturally happened through word of mouth. Customers looking for cheaper storage solutions and people looking to make extra money heard of the company from friends and family and wanted to get involved. What started as a good idea in a college town has not only spread throughout Utah but is organically spreading throughout the rest of the United States. For the founding team, seeing



Left ▶ OmniEarth founder Joseph Walker shows his organic fertilizer.

how their solution makes people's lives easier has been a huge reward and has encouraged them to continue growing their business.

After seeing the success of its maternity bands to measure prenatal kicks, Rubi Life decided to expand from a single product to a technology licensing company. Founder Eric Stopper realized he had potentially revolutionary technology on his hands and that sensors like those used in the maternity band could be added to a variety of existing items to turn them into smart products.

He licensed the maternity band to a company better able to handle the customer moving forward and put his effort into expanding the sensors and licensing the technology to a number of other companies. What started as a single successful crop has grown into a field of different plants ripe for the harvest.

After initial growth, farmers often must make adjustments to their planting plan before the next crop is harvested. With the preparation complete, additional crops can continue to grow and thrive. Khione is focused on distributing the SHEL to its Kickstarter backers and building a strong brand through a quality flagship product. TrashTalk's next goals focus on customer relationships and refining the product. Having nailed down its target market and pricing strategy, Dentium Club looks to throw fuel on its best-performing marketing channels.

FaiRepair has signed deals with multiple dealerships around Utah and is saving clients thousands of dollars a year. Venga is expanding its contract sharing service into areas such as phone and car contracts—both places with huge potential for growth. OmniEarth is working hard to keep

up with demand and sending manure to customers around the country who buy it as quickly as the worms produce it. Neiybor is growing its customer base for student and seasonal storage and expanding around the country. Rubi Life, now Sensable Technologies, is currently fundraising \$1 million at a \$5 million valuation to continue to grow the brand and is in licensing talks for its sensors with large sports-tech companies.

Just like the newest batch of tested entrepreneurs has learned, seasoned farmers know that most things take longer, are more expensive, and are more difficult than originally anticipated, but if they stick to their planting plan, they will experience the reward of the harvest.

Enjoying the Harvest

While these Founders may have already enjoyed harvesting their ideas, the work isn't over for any of these innovative and proven crops. Now experienced farmers weathered by the winds of the field, these entrepreneurs will continue to carry on with their crops as another wave of crops prepares to be planted.

THIS SEASON: STARTUPS TO WATCH

Khione Outdoor Gear

PLANTED: May 2017
WORK: Outdoor gear, including a hammock shelter called the SHEL.
FOUNDERS: Caleb Lystrup and Casey Messick

OmniEarth

PLANTED: April 2016
WORK: Organic fertilizer created from natural ingredients and worm manure
FOUNDER: Joseph Walker

Sensable Technologies

PLANTED: January 2017
WORK: Sensors to turn any item into a smart product
FOUNDER: Eric Stopper

FaiRepair

PLANTED: June 2017
WORK: Antifraud camera system for auto dealership service departments
FOUNDERS: Tanner Beckstrand and Caleb Wagner

Dentium Club

PLANTED: October 2016
WORK: Subscription service professional-grade teeth whitening
FOUNDER: Peter Gallagher

Neiybor

PLANTED: July 2016
WORK: The "Airbnb of storage" to connect people looking for storage spaces with people who have extra space to rent out
FOUNDER: Preston Alder, Colton Gardner, and Joseph Woodbury

Venga

PLANTED: January 2017
WORK: Management platform and mobile app for buying and selling housing contracts
FOUNDER: Lee Chang

TrashTalk

PLANTED: July 2016
WORK: Trash can and dumpster sensors that alert trash companies when the bins are full
FOUNDER: Matthew Liddle

THE MOVEMENT:

Women Entrepreneurs Making Presence Felt

by Michelle Kaiser

In a world long dominated by men, women entrepreneurs are bringing insight, experience, and dedication to boardrooms and businesses in every industry. Women are seizing opportunities, creating companies, and experiencing success in growing numbers as they join the movement of women entrepreneurs.

That movement is being seen at BYU Marriott and in the halls of the Tanner Building as more women than ever pursue business and entrepreneurship education and degrees. "Women have intangible attributes that showcase everything that's important to entrepreneurship," says Taunya Brown, Rollins Center events manager. "They were born to create and to be leaders and successful business owners."

Part of this growth is due to a concerted effort by BYU and the center, including a recent push to invite more women to speak, mentor students, and join advisory boards. These seasoned entrepreneurs are eager and willing to share their experience and knowledge with students.

"Our goal is to inspire, empower, and support female entrepreneurs," Brown says.

the desire to make it happen. It's about helping them understand the opportunities available to them through entrepreneurship."

Women student entrepreneurs aren't alone. They are part of a network of female BYU alumnae taking the business world by storm. These women are at varying stages of their careers, but regardless of where they are, they aim to lift each other.

"There's something empowering when other women see the good in your company and catch the vision," says Emily Kelly, co-founder of Mentionables. "When other females support you and have your back, something bigger is created."

Kelly's business is relatively young but has already shown what can happen with the unique touch of a woman founder. The 2013 marketing graduate co-founded the model-less lingerie company in early 2017 with 2018 MBA graduate Emily Smith. The goal was to create a new lingerie shopping experience that left women feeling inspired, beautiful, and empowered. Kelly's experience at BYU Marriott helped her build connections and gain the skills

to run the growing business.

Another contributor to the band of women entrepreneurs is Cydni Tetro, who has more than two decades of business and entrepreneurial experience she is eager to share with the rising generation.

Tetro knows what it's like to be the only woman in the room. She was one of just three women in her graduating class in computer science.

Now she's leading the charge to create more opportunities for women in technology. After earning her MBA from BYU Marriott in 1998, Tetro worked with companies ranging from Fortune 500 powerhouses to smaller startups. But her greatest work is the Women Tech Council, a group she founded eleven years ago that now has more than ten thousand members.

"I saw a need to create and accelerate opportunities for women," Tetro says. "Women are coming together to change an entire industry and make a difference in the future."

Tetro realized early in her career that she was able to bring a different perspective to business, not just because of her gender but because of her skill set and tenacity. She

now shares her experience as a woman in technology with the Women Tech Council and helps members make connections and develop skills to further their careers.

The movement of women entrepreneurs is growing and succeeding not because of their gender but because they naturally have the

skills and grit to take on the challenges that come with entrepreneurship. Regardless of whether it's their first semester in a business class or their thirtieth year in the boardroom, women are showing that the face and future of business and entrepreneurship is changing—and for the better.



Photo courtesy of Emily Kelly

Emily Kelly, co-founder of Mentionables



Photo courtesy of Cydni Tetro

Cydni Tetro, founder of Women Tech Council